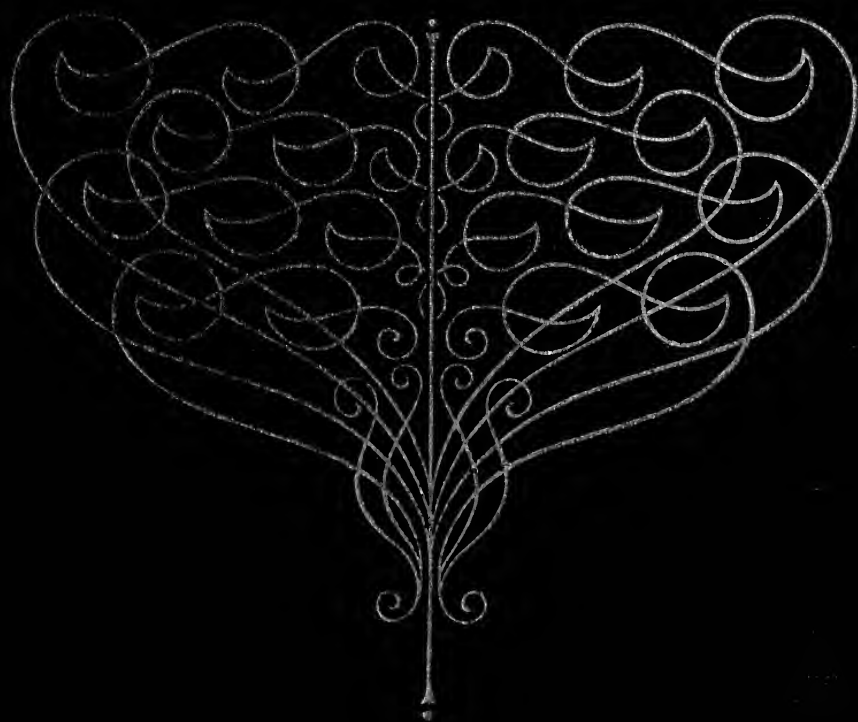


# GREAT MASTERS IN PAINTING & SCULPTURE



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PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA



**The Great Masters  
in Painting and Sculpture  
Edited by G. C. Williamson**

**PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA**

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*Winans, photo*

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*Portrait of a Lady  
by Piero della Francesca.*

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PIERO DELLA  
FRANCESCA

BY

W. G. WATERS, M.A.

WORCESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD



LONDON  
GEORGE BELL AND SONS

1901

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- 1406 (*circa*). Born at Borgo San Sepolcro of Benedetto dei Franceschi and Romana di Perino.
- 1439-1445. Working with Domenico Veneziano at Santa Maria Novella, in Florence.
1445. Receives a commission for the altar-piece, the Madonna della Misericordia, now in the chapel of the hospital at Borgo San Sepolcro.
1446. With Domenico Veneziano at Loreto.
- 1447-1450? At Rome.
1451. Paints the fresco and portrait of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta at Rimini.
- 1452? At Ferrara.
- 1453-1469. Working at Arezzo in San Francesco and in the cathedral, and at intervals at Borgo San Sepolcro. In 1454 he receives a commission from the Augustinians at Borgo San Sepolcro to paint an Assumption of the Virgin, and in 1469 he signs a receipt for payment of the balance due for the same. In 1460 he paints the fresco of San Ludovico now in the Municipio at Borgo San Sepolcro, and in 1466 the Company of the Annunziata at Arezzo commissions him to paint a processional banner, the final balance due for the same being paid in 1468 at Bastia, a village near Borgo San Sepolcro.
1469. He stays some time in Urbino as the guest, or at the charges of Giovanni Santi.

1478. He paints a fresco (mentioned by Vasari) in the hospital of the Misericordia in Borgo San Sepolcro.
1487. Makes his will.
1492. Dies.

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# PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

TO those people whose imaginations are adequately sentient to the true message of art, the personality of a great master reveals itself like a radiant gleam of colour in some beloved and oft visited canvas—some climax of sound in a symphony or concerto. The colour, getting and spending beauty in its perfect environment, becomes a mere patch of red or yellow when parted from its setting, and a similar degeneration befalls the musical phrase when heard dissociated from the prelude and sequence which helped to build up its dignity and expression. But the case of the hypothetical master stands on a somewhat different ground. However completely he may fill his place in the hierarchy of art, however much of charm may evaporate when he comes to be treated individually and apart, the loss here will not be so manifest as in either of the instances just cited. He remains a potent operative force, a subject for treatment only one degree less interesting than the whole corpus of art itself.

The complex series of ideas, serving to constitute the impression which the sound of the name of a particular

master may suggest, will flow from a dozen varying sources; from legends of the young student sitting in the *bottega* of some teacher whose name is only just rescued from oblivion by the reflected lustre of his pupil's fame; from the spectacle of the finished master moving a stately figure through courts and cities, revered alike by cultivated churchmen—and here and there a prince of the same temper—and by cut-throat nobles and coarse-fibred traffickers and craftsmen; and from the appreciation of the keen intellectual storm and stress amidst which he lived, and which he helped to realize and perpetuate in marble or on canvas. But by far the most powerful and abiding of these impressions are those which haunt the memory after studying the fading and perhaps half-perished fruit of his genius in some mouldering church or dismal *pinacoteca* in a moribund Italian town—impressions which likewise give a quasi-sanctification to the visit paid to its squalid melancholy precincts.

And when these separate impressions and rays of memory shall have run into focus—when we shall have formulated mentally the personality of our master—this personality will still remain something vaporous and fleeting, something difficult to apprehend and to interpret with precision and unity, even to kindred intelligences, unless the exponent shall happen to be endowed with certain gifts of sympathy and expression. And unless there is a likelihood that this feat may be accomplished with moderate success, unless the written words can be invested with the vital qualities of things, the task will not be worth the trouble.

A correct and painstaking narrative of the Master's



life and movements ; an exhaustive *elenchus* of his work, with the genuine disentangled from the false and doubtful ; a carefully drawn-up table of the months, or weeks, or days he may have spent in the studio of this or that teacher ; or a sincere and laborious attempt to trace the influence exercised on him by some particular teacher in works subsequently produced, may be held to be within the literary scope of the majority of those who find their chief joy in art, and desire to record their impressions of the same ; but treatises composed of such materials as these may quite easily fail to inform the reader of the real mission of the central figure, or to illustrate his position in relation to his contemporaries and surroundings. This is scarcely the place to dogmatize as to the nature of the life-giving touch requisite to vivify such dry bones as the aforesaid. Suffice it to say that the attainment of moderate success in this department of letters is no small honour ; and that failure, disappointing as it must be, is no disgrace.

To treat of Piero della Francesca<sup>1</sup> on the lines above designated is not an easy task. It is true that as much is known concerning his artistic development as is known about the careers of many of the masters whose names bulk more largely than his in the world's estimate. There are on record certain details of his student life and training ; of his by-studies and excursions into the field

<sup>1</sup> It has recently become the fashion to write his name Piero dei Franceschi, but until some authoritative rule is introduced into the nomenclature of Italian painters it seems futile to apply to Piero any other style than that which has always been applied to him as a painter. Judging from his signature on his works he would probably have called himself Pietro del Borgo.

of mathematics; and of the pupils he taught. His legacy of painting, the greater part of which has been passed as genuine by the most rigid purists of the modern school of experts, survives, though in many cases irreparably injured.

We know, albeit imperfectly, that he was at different periods of his life the honoured guest at the splendid and cultivated court of Urbino in the days of the good Duke Federigo, that he also lived for a time in the sinister atmosphere of Malatesta's castle at Rimini; while Fra Luca Pacioli, a citizen of Borgo San Sepolcro, and one of the leading mathematicians of his age, writes in his "Architettura," "and illustrious amongst mathematicians is Piero della Francesca, who in this our day is recognized as the monarch of painting and of architecture as well, as is proved by the works he has produced with his brush, frescoes, pictures on panels, some in oil and some in water-colour (*guazzo*), in Urbino, Bologna, Ferrara, Rimini, Ancona, and in our own country, especially in the city of Arezzo in the great chapel of the choir behind the high altar of San Francesco, one of the most excellent works of Italy and praised by all men. And he is likewise renowned for his treatise on perspective which is now in the library of our illustrious Duke of Urbino."

Vasari treats Piero *more suo*, and is perhaps more anecdotic than usual, but it must be admitted that these details of his life and personality, interesting as they may be, render little help in the task of fathoming the secret of the charm which holds all those who study his pictures deeply and intelligently enough to realize the strange and subtle power of his idealization

and method, or in teaching us why it is that his low-toned, faded and half-perished frescoes in Arezzo and Borgo San Sepolcro have power to stir the mental activities of his true votaries more effectively than do the stately and gorgeous canvases of the Venetian masters.

There is a view that is now greatly in vogue concerning all 'great masters, and Piero' is one of them—that their strength lies chiefly in what is called their impersonality, and there is a certain amount of truth in this contention. It is maintained that an artist who lets his work be signed all over with his mental and emotional idiosyncrasies has no claim for a place amongst, or even near to, the seats of the elect. A great orator, when he sets to work to prove his case, brings forth his arguments carefully selected and subordinated and presses them home in due sequence with flawless logic and appropriate illustration. He presents his work in such fashion that it stands out a masterpiece ready to be considered, if need be, entirely apart from the cause to advance which it may have been spoken, and never trusts to produce an effect by tricking out his speech with tags of his own feelings and preferences. It is a commonplace of the courts that an advocate must be at his wit's end when he bases his discourse on his personal conviction of the justice of his client's cause; and with a great painter the same rule is held to apply. However powerfully he may be stirred by the original impression of the scene or thing which he proposes to represent, he must be careful to keep his work free from all suspicion of promptings, excited by the subjective emotion, at the moment when he first gathered consciousness of the thing he is moved to reproduce.

We are taught, therefore, that the impersonal artist—to repeat the current formula—is he who refrains from reproducing his own feelings in the delineation of the subject chosen. Whatever else may happen, his picture must never show itself to be what the best judges tell us a masterpiece of literature is bound to be, to wit, the revelation of a personality. The painter must reproduce his subject as it has presented itself to his consciousness, unmodified entirely by the working of any emotion which may have possessed him either before or during its creation, and we are told that, if he has followed obediently the precepts aforesaid, we, when we look at his work, shall see it as he saw it, and feel as he felt.

To some this will be a hard saying, and, indeed, the theory of impersonality is much easier to sustain with regard to the work of a portrait-painter or of a landscapist than with regard to that of an artist whose aim is to produce an imaginative work, or one expressive of human passion or achievement. In the world of portraiture the finest work will be unquestionably that of the master gifted with reticence, the faculty of self-effacement, the clear vision to fathom and the sure rapid touch to perpetuate the essential characteristics of the sitter. In the portrait of an individual person the expression of the painter's emotions or idiosyncrasies is entirely out of place. We only want the forcible, veracious, and significant expression of the personality of the sitter as the painter first grasped it, but it is doubtful whether this rule will apply equally when the painter of a great allegory or dramatic episode in history throws his vision on the canvas, or elicits it from the yielding clay.

With regard to the views aforesaid, we have it on the

authority of Leonardo da Vinci that one of the most common defects in the portrait-painter is his tendency to produce the most salient marks of his own personality in the presentation of his sitters. In the treatise on painting (cap. 108) he writes: "It is a great defect in artists to repeat the same movements, faces, and draperies in one and the same composition, and to give to most countenances the features of the author himself. I have often felt surprise at this, for I have known many artists who in their figures seem to have portrayed themselves, so that their own attitudes and gestures have been reproduced in the population of their pictures. If a painter is quick and vivacious in gesture and language, his figures have an equal vivacity. If he is pious, his figures, with their drooped heads, seem pious too. If he is indolent, his figures are laziness personified. If he lacks proportion, his figures are also badly built. Finally, if he is mad, the state of his mind is reflected in his work, which lacks cohesion and reality. His personages look about them like people in a dream. And so all the distinctive features of the pictures are regulated by the author's character." And again, in another place (cap. 58), he goes on as if to show that, however valuable the gift of impersonality may be to a portrait-painter, it is not a quality to be desired in certain other fields of art. "Amongst those whose profession it is to paint portraits, the men who make the best likenesses—*i.e.*, those who are in the highest degree impersonal—are the least effectual when the composition of an historical picture is in question."<sup>1</sup>

Bearing in mind the remarks of this illustrious master,

<sup>1</sup> E. Müntz, "Leonardo da Vinci." London, 1898, vol. i., pp. 237-238.

we may well ask how an artist, bundle of quivering nerves as he is, should, in the elaboration of some great episode of dramatic passion, be able to let his production emerge as something entirely external to himself, and to keep it untouched by his personality; and the answer, in the case of the majority of inquirers, will be that he cannot.

An illustration to help to show how the artist's temperament may be manifested in his work, and that work still remain one of the wonders of the world, may be found in Michael Angelo's sculptures in the sacristy of San Lorenzo at Florence. Surely any student of the times who has mastered the political situation in Italy during the pontificate of the ill-starred Clement VII., and at the same time gained an insight into the genius and character of Michael Angelo, and into the political passions and aspirations which moved him scarcely less powerfully than the afflatus of his art, will be able to discover for himself the significance of those wonderful marble shapes without the prompting of Mr. Symonds' florid, but at the same time just and appropriate description of them. The sculptor was racked and tormented by his undisciplinable temper, by the ingratitude of patrons, and by the ruin which had fallen on Italy in the sack of Rome and in the enslavement of Florence. He was, moreover, ignorant of these new rules which are supposed to govern contemporary artists and critics, so he let every line of his creation give token of the emotions which possessed him as he tore these miraculous forms from the envelope of circumjacent stone. There is no need to dilate here on the amazing result achieved

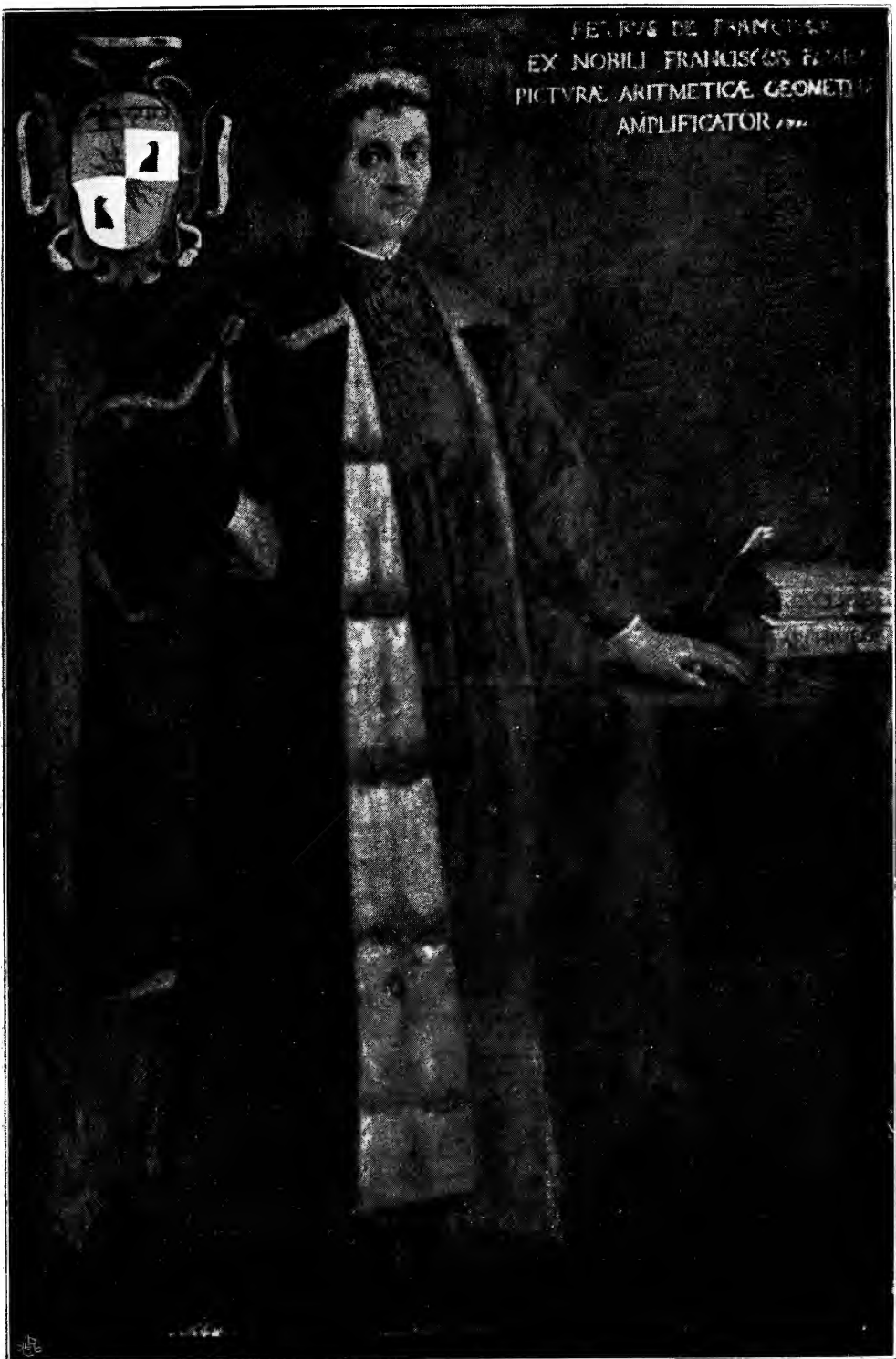
The world has to thank the indomitable force of Michael Angelo's passion—a passion aggravated no doubt by the consciousness that he was spending his best energies in the glorification of the race of assassins and spoilers who had ruined the liberty he adored—for the *Night* and the *Dawn* and the *Statue of Lorenzo*; had he listened to and obeyed the teachings of the gospel of universal impersonality, the world would now lack these masterpieces. It is true that the world has also to deplore the outrage done to Art by the maladroit ambition of his imitators, who set to work to copy his lines and dimensions without one prompting thrill of sympathetic emotion. To work as these impostors worked, to writhe and struggle in the effort to produce an outward sign of a feeling which was entirely lacking in them, was to sin beyond forgiveness; but to let genuine passion blossom and flower as it did in the aforesaid masterpieces was to achieve the grandest triumph of art.

It has seemed necessary to labour the foregoing point at some length in order to leave the ground clear for the consideration of the essential questions as to the spirit in which Piero della Francesca worked, and as to the effect generally produced by his paintings upon those who have given careful study both to the pictures themselves and to the age in which they were created. To the first of these questions, as to the moving spirit of Piero's work, the answer must be that it was absolute sincerity—a sincerity which was the fruit of careful study and heaped-up knowledge, rather than of any special inherent tendency in that direction. Many of his contemporaries and forerunners may have been equally well endowed with sympathy and insight, but no single one of them had

the interpretative skill which he possessed—Masaccio excepted. Paolo Uccello may have preceded him as a perspectivist and Pollajuolo may have left more carefully drawn studies of anatomy, but neither of these was Piero's equal in the faculty of presenting to the beholder the true significance of things seen in such wise as to let their meaning be grasped as something by itself, and unalloyed by any other impression, save that of his own informing passion.

To the second question, as to the message which his pictures bring, the reply will naturally be less simple. The full message will not be the same in cases where temperaments are sharply diverse, but it will not be rash to assert that the vast majority of those students, who have studied Piero as he deserves to be studied, will be agreed as to those of his characteristics which are most strongly operative in formulating this message. They will bring forward his distinctive reticence and his strong individuality. A very brief consideration would demonstrate how naturally properties like these would characterize a brush moved as Piero's was by the traditions and practice of the school in which his hand and eye were trained, but this consideration may best be entertained when the time comes for discussing the method and mental attitude of the school and of the master who taught him. Before attempting this task, which must necessarily be retrospective, it will be convenient to give a brief outline of Piero's birth and early life.





*Private photo]*

*[Signor Franceschi-Marini, of Borgo San Sepolcro*

PORTRAIT OF PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA



## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHICAL. RIMINI AND THE VATICAN

**P**IERO DI BENEDETTO DEI FRANCESCHI, to give him his full name, was born at Borgo San Sepolcro, a city lying in the valley of the Upper Tiber, nestling at the foot of the Apennines and situated about midway between Arezzo and Urbino. It has been fruitful of painters, and claims amongst its citizens such men as Raffaelle del Colle, Santi di Tito, Matteo di Giovanni, and Cristoforo Gherardi. The exact date of Piero's birth cannot be fixed. He died in 1492, and if, as Vasari states, he lived eighty-six years, he must have been born in 1406. His name is sometimes written as Pietro del Borgo; and, until recent years, he has been known in the world of Art as Piero della Francesca, a style which has been the cause of no little confusion in defining his family status. According to Vasari's account he was so named after his mother, a certain Francesca, who was pregnant with him at the time of her husband's death; her name having been given to him for the reason that she had brought him up, and assisted him to rise to the level which good fortune had allotted to him. Rosini<sup>1</sup> repeats Vasari's error, and F. A. Gruyer,<sup>2</sup> writing as late as 1869, furnishes some ad-

<sup>1</sup> "Storia della Pittura Italiana." Pisa, vol. iii., p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> "Les Vierges de Raphael." Paris, 1869, vol. i., p. 471.

ditional details to the effect that Piero was the natural child of a poor woman who had been basely abandoned by her seducer, but he gives no authority for this statement. M. Gruyer, however, is copying or even amplifying Vasari's account without inquiry, a practice he again adopts in endorsing Vasari's mistakes about Piero being summoned to Urbino by "Guidobaldo Feltre," and about his working with Bramantino di Milano in the Vatican.

In 1874, Signor Francesco Corrazini,<sup>1</sup> after a search in the municipal archives at Borgo San Sepolcro, discovered the fact that Piero's father was a certain Benedetto dei Franceschi, or della Francesca, a member of a family which had been established in the city for three generations, and had given seven members to the Consiglio del Commune. This Benedetto married Romana di Perino di Carlo da Monterchi. Signor Gaetano Milanesi in his latest edition of Vasari<sup>2</sup> has treated in full the question of Piero's descent, and has given a genealogical tree of the Franceschi family; he has, moreover, ascertained that Benedetto, Piero's father, died somewhere about the year 1465—a fact which upsets Vasari's statement that the boy's education was left entirely to the care of his mother. She, according to Vasari, died just at the time when Piero had finished his work in Rome.

All details of his early life are wanting, and no one knows what art training he received—or indeed whether he received any at all—until he became the pupil of

<sup>1</sup> "Appunti storici e filologici sulla Valle tiberina toscana." San Sepolcro, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> Firenze. G. C. Sansoni, 1878-1885. All references to Vasari are made to this edition.

Domenico Veneziano, a painter who at this time enjoyed considerable vogue. In spite of his name, Venice had no share in Domenico's art training, the character of his work being more suggestive of Florentine influences and the study of Donatello's sculpture than of the teaching of any other school. Some historians in glancing at these early years profess to find in Piero's style traces of Sienese teaching, while others are confident that he must have studied under some miniaturist of Gubbio or Perugia—Matteo di Cambio, for choice—on account of the method he afterwards used in handling finely-drawn figures.<sup>1</sup> In 1438, Domenico Veneziano was in Perugia engaged in decorating the Baglioni palace with portraits of illustrious warriors, civilians, and philosophers. This visit is fixed with some degree of certainty by a letter written by him from Perugia this same year to Piero dei Medici at Florence, in which he begs Piero to use his interest to secure for him a commission from Cosmo to paint a certain altar-piece.<sup>2</sup> It is very likely, though there is no direct evidence on the point, that Piero may have worked with Domenico as his pupil at Perugia; it is not until 1439, when Domenico went to Florence to paint the chapels in the Ospedale and in Santa Maria Novella, that the names of these two painters are associated.<sup>3</sup>

From 1439 to 1445 Domenico was at work in the

<sup>1</sup> Rosini, *op. cit.*, vol. iii., p. 37.      <sup>2</sup> Vasari, vol. ii., p. 674, note.

<sup>3</sup> Signor Milanese has discovered in the hospital accounts the following details, which are cited by Cavalcaselle e Crowe, vol. v., p. 121: "M. Domenicho di Bartolomeio da Vinezia che dipinge la chapella maggiore di Santo Gidio de'dare a dì vii di Sett. F. 44; ed de'dare a dì xii di Sett. F. 2. 5. 15. Pietro Benedetto dal Borgo a San Sepolchro sta collui."

chapel of the hospital, and also in the chapel of Sant' Egidio in the church itself, and he took his young pupil with him, his workman assistant at the time being Bicci di Lorenzo. Piero, at the end of this period, must have parted company with his master for a time, for in 1445 he received a commission from the Brotherhood of the Misericordia at Borgo San Sepolcro to paint an altarpiece for the chapel of their hospital. It must have been after the completion of this work that, according to Vasari, they joined company again, and went to decorate the sacristy of Our Lady at Loreto, where they remained till they were driven away by fear of the plague.<sup>1</sup> It is known that the plague raged in the Marches in 1447, and for several years after,<sup>2</sup> wherefore it is permissible to indicate 1446-1447 as the period of Piero's stay in Loreto. In his life of Domenico Veneziano,<sup>3</sup> Vasari tells another story, to wit, that the two painters went to Loreto before Domenico began his work in Santa Maria Novella; but, if this version be accepted, his allusion to the outbreak of plague loses its meaning. As is the case in Florence, all trace of their work at Loreto has vanished, though Vasari asserts that Domenico and his pupil began the decoration of the roof of the sacristy, and further suggests that this work of Piero's, which was possibly left unfinished through fear of the plague, may have been completed later on by his pupil Luca Signorelli.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, vol. ii., p. 495.

<sup>2</sup> Calcagni, "Memorie istoriche di Recanati;" Torsellini, "De Historia Lauretana." Milano, 1606.

<sup>3</sup> Vasari, vol. ii., p. 674.

<sup>4</sup> This could not have been, as Signorelli painted entirely in the

In 1445 Piero painted what is probably the earliest of his surviving works, the altar-piece in the chapel of the Misericordia at Borgo San Sepolcro. If exact chronological order were to be observed, this work would be noticed at once, but it seems more convenient to consider at the same time all his paintings still remaining in his birthplace. Vasari records that Piero went direct from Loreto to paint the Bacci chapel in San Francesco at Arezzo, but there are good reasons for rejecting this statement. Nothing is really known of his work for the next four years, but in 1451 his whereabouts and one of his most important frescoes can be identified.

In this year Piero went or was summoned to Rimini, where Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta was engaged in considering Leo Battista Alberti's plans for the reconstruction of the Cathedral of San Francesco. Malatesta was one of the strangest figures on the political stage of Italy in the fifteenth century. The son of a father almost as infamous as himself, he was a man stained with the most abominable vices, and at the same time an ardent lover of art and powerfully swayed by the revived pagan spirit of the time. He was cruel, treacherous, and licentious, sparing neither wife, nor son, nor daughter, and there is a lurid tale of his calculated villainy to be noted later on in connection with the ill-fated Od' Antonio of Urbino.

A man with Piero's artistic and scientific equipment would be sure of a welcome at Malatesta's court, and on present existing church at Loreto, which was not begun till 1468. Domenico and his pupil might well have left paintings in the old church, which was then destroyed.

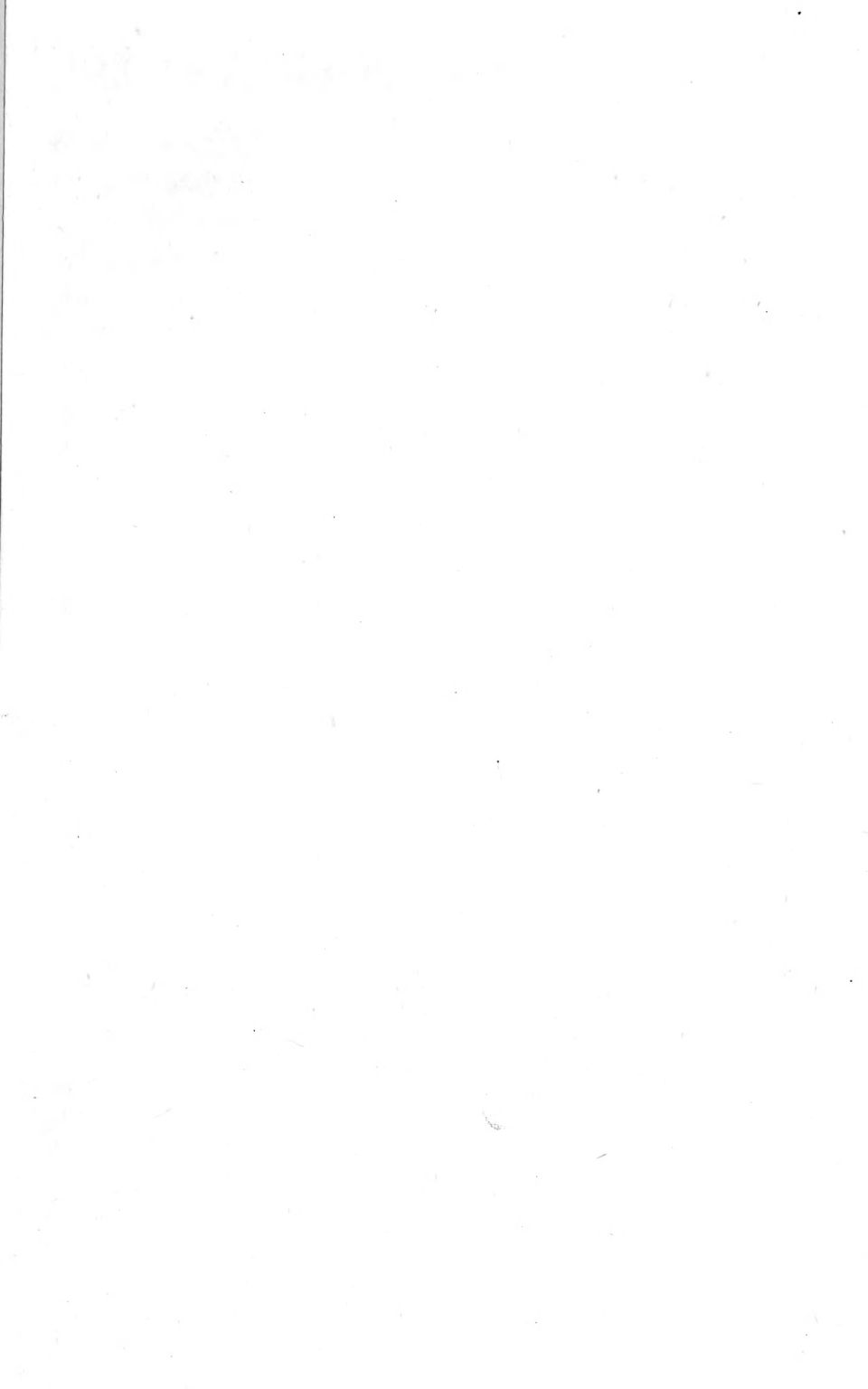
Piero's side there was, moreover, a special reason why he, as a citizen of Borgo San Sepolcro, should pay his respects to the Lord of Rimini, for in the preceding century Carlo and Galeotto Malatesta had taken upon themselves the duty of safeguarding the independence of San Sepolcro, and without this protection it is highly probable that the little city would have been absorbed by the Republic of Florence long before its final annexation in 1441.

There is extant a letter written in 1449 by Sigismondo from the camp of the Venetians, who under his leadership were besieging Cremona, to Giovanni dei Medici,<sup>1</sup> concerning the decoration of the new buildings at Rimini, in which the following words occur: "As to the master painter, seeing that the chapels are yet too newly built, it would be well to defer the painting of the same for the present, for it would be labour thrown away. My object is as follows. I wish, until the chapels shall be ready to be decorated, to employ him on some other work, something which will suit his purpose and mine as well; and this so that I may have him at my disposition when I want him, and because he is, as you say, in want of money. I propose to make an agreement with him and to advance him a certain sum, and give him security whereby he may claim the balance when he wishes to have it. Therefore, will you kindly let him know what my requirements are, and tell him that I mean to treat him well, so that he may come and live and die in my country?"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Second son of Cosimo the Great.

<sup>2</sup> Tonini, "Rimini nella Signoria dei Malatesti." Rimini, 1887, vol. v., p. 297.







*Pl. 11. 11.*

*Vita Malatesta I. 11. 11.*

*A. B. 11. 11.*

SIGISMONDO MALATESTA KNEELING BEFORE ST. SIGISMUND



Signor Pichi<sup>1</sup> in his life of Piero is of opinion that this letter must refer to Piero, but the use of the expression "maestro dipintore" rather suggests a reference to Domenico Veneziano. Sigismondo must have known of the relative position of the two painters in the past, and it seems more likely that in writing to a Medici at Florence he should allude to a painter with a great Florentine reputation, rather than to a young man little known as Piero then was ; but, whatever may have been his meaning, Piero certainly was the painter commissioned to decorate the walls of the Tempio Malatestiano at Rimini as soon as the mortar might be sufficiently dry to take the colour, and now, in the *Cappella delle Reliquie* there, we may stand face to face with what is almost certainly the earliest of Piero's surviving frescoes.<sup>2</sup> It is a large composition containing a portrait of Sigismondo himself kneeling before the seated figure of Sigismund of Burgundy, who fills the place of patron saint. The latter sits on the left of the picture dressed in kingly robes, with a peaked velvet cap on his head and orb and sceptre in his hands. Sigismondo, with his face given in exact profile, kneels in the centre of the scene, and behind him lie two wolf-hounds magnificently drawn and full of life. The first impression the fresco gives is one characteristically distinctive of the Umbrian school, a splendid generosity of space. The figures of the men and dogs and the architectural details

<sup>1</sup> "La Vita e le Opere di Piero della Francesca." San Sepolcro, 1893, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> E. Müntz, "L'Arte Italiana nel Quattrocento" (Milano, 1895), gives an earlier date, 1445, to the fresco of the *Resurrection* at Borgo San Sepolcro ; but this is purely hypothetical (p. 616)

occupy a good part of the wall space, but behind the figure of Sigismondo the eye may range over distance beyond distance towards a group of low hills like those which rise from the valley of the Tiber looking from Borgo San Sepolcro in the direction of Anghiari. The composition is simple, but the just balance between the two somewhat incongruous figures, and the way in which the hounds are grouped give token of careful posing, though it may be noted that Piero was as yet too much absorbed in striving after the perfect rendering of the human figure to give adequate care to composition. In this instance it must be admitted that he has succeeded far better with the living original than with the idealized figure of Sigismund, which, though the face is majestic and well modelled, is wanting in dignity and somewhat commonplace. In Sigismondo's portrait the careless and shallow treatment of the draperies brings out in forcible relief the marvellous individuality of the head, and, in lesser degree, of the folded hands.

Here indeed the impersonality or self-effacement of the artist is something to be thankful for. Piero has set down just enough to reveal the true character of the man, and not one jot more. Sigismondo is in a devotional attitude, but, in his impassive figure, and in his sphinx-like face, with its closely pressed lips and narrow slits of eyes, there is a suggestion that his reverence is of the most perfunctory nature, and that he is conveying no slight honour on his patron saint by this act of devotion. Both of the figures are draped so as to reveal adequately the shapes underneath,<sup>1</sup> and the framework of archi-

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Felix Witting, in his "Piero dei Franceschi" (Strassburg, 1898), p. 28, tries to show that Piero must have previously learnt



*Alinari photo]*

*[Malatesta Temple (San Francesco), Rimini*

HEAD OF MALATESTA



tectural detail in which they are set is admirably drawn and in perfect harmony with the figures themselves, an achievement due no doubt in some degree to the study of the frescoes of Paolo Uccello in the cloisters of Santa Maria Novella at Florence, but still more to the work of Alberti executed on the exterior of the cathedral. The rim of the carpet on which Sigismondo kneels is enriched with an exquisite pattern, and on the wall to the right is a medallion in which is represented the Castle of Rimini, with the inscription, "Castellum Sigismundum MCCCCXLVI," a fact which misled the author of the "Pitture delle Chiese di Rimini," in that he has given 1446 as the date of the fresco. This oversight is all the stranger seeing that under the panel in the boldest lettering is written, "Sanctus Sigismundus Sigismundus Pandolfus Malatesta Petri de Burgo opus MCCCCLI."<sup>1</sup>

In this wonderful picture there is perhaps a suggestion that Piero was touched by the prevalent sentiment of alienation from the current manifestations of religious belief. There is certainly nothing to show that he as the decorator, or Leo Battista Alberti as the architect of the Tempio Malatestiano, was at all outraged in religious feeling by the neo-Pagan character of Malatesta's enterprise, or by the commission given to rear and adorn this monument dedicated "Divæ Isottæ Sacrum"; nor is there any record of contemporary censure passed upon how to paint rich draperies from studying the work of Roger van der Weyden at Ferrara. If Dr. Witting had studied the *Virgin and Child* in the National Gallery by Domenico Veneziano, he might have been able to give a more probable source of Piero's skill in painting brocade.

<sup>1</sup> Dennistoun, in his "Memoirs of the Dukes of Urbino," 1851, vol. ii., p. 198, also gives an erroneous date, *i.e.*, 1448.



either of them ; and Sigismondo, sinister figure as he was, seems to have raised little contemporary scandal by his manner of life.

A modern writer, M. Rio, in his work "L'Art Chrétien," has been moved to charge Piero with what was, according to the writer's view, nothing less than an act of public profanation, in consenting to perpetuate by his handiwork the memory of Sigismondo's mistress, Isotta, the height of indecency being reached by the portrayal of a monster so infamous as Sigismondo kneeling reverently before his patron saint. A statement like this is indeed a strange admission of impotence, on the part of a man professing to write history, to realize the sentiment and the tendencies of the age in which Piero painted. Writing from the orthodox standpoint, M. Rio can only see one side of the question, and fails to realize that an indictment, quite as strong as his own against Piero, might be drawn against any of the painters who accepted the patronage of Sixtus IV. or Leo X.

The Malatesta portrait has given opportunity for another ineptitude of criticism, scarcely less astonishing, to Signor Rosini, who, when discussing this work, declares that but for the name signed thereon he would never have believed that Piero could have painted it. This historian of Art further remarks in another place, while writing of the great fresco of the *Resurrection* at Borgo San Sepolcro, that this, the most characteristic creation that Piero has left, "seems to resemble the work of Luca Signorelli rather than that of Piero."<sup>1</sup> Bearing

<sup>1</sup> Rosini, *op. cit.*, vol. iii., p. 38.

this statement in mind it will be well, for the future, to receive his criticisms with caution. Pisanello and Gentile da Fabriano also worked at Rimini, but there is no evidence to show that they and Piero were there at the same time.

Piero's wanderings in Italy and the dates of his sojourn in various cities cannot be followed exactly or fixed with any chronological accuracy. Dates must be largely hypothetical. Any structural narrative that may be attempted must needs be raised on the untrustworthy foundation of Vasari's record, which gives little else than a sequence of events without dates, and with no attempt at chronological order. With regard to Piero's visit to Rome, Vasari states that he was summoned thither by Pope Nicolas V., who became pope in 1447, and that while he was there he worked with Bramantino di Milano in decorating the upper chambers of the Vatican. A long controversy has raged over the identity of this coadjutor of Piero's. Signor Milanesi, in his commentary on the life of Garofalo,<sup>1</sup> declares that Vasari has entirely mistaken the facts: that this Bramantino who worked in the Vatican was not Bramantino di Milano at all, but Bartolommeo Suardi, *detto il Bramantino*, and that he worked, not in company with Piero, but later on with Perugino, Signorelli, and others.

With regard to the presence of Piero in any particular place at any particular time, the data given by Vasari are just as vague, and an attempt to follow them up leads

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, vol. vi., p. 528. Bramantino di Milano was Agostino Bramantini. Vasari (vol. iv., p. 148) erroneously describes him as the master of Bramante of Urbino, the great architect.

from one quagmire of hypothesis to another. Piero is fixed at Rimini in 1451, and it is impossible to say with certainty whether his visit to Rome took place between this date and 1455, the year Pope Nicolas died, or in the period between 1447 and 1451, though the balance of probability inclines towards the earlier time; and when Rome is reached, there is just as much uncertainty about divining the existence, or the position, or the subject, of any picture he may have designed or painted. After, therefore, giving a short summary of what tradition says, it seems that the only labour which promises to repay the trouble will be that spent in searching for any traces which the presence of Piero in Rome may have left, and in considering later on whether these traces were of a nature to influence the work of the painters who may have been his contemporaries, or who may have succeeded him in the task of decorating the Vatican apartments.

It is stated by Vasari that Piero painted in the Vatican two large historical frescoes which contained the representations of many of the illustrious personages of the time, amongst whom were Charles VII. of France, Niccolo Fortebraccio, Antonio Colonna, Francesco Carmignuola, Giovanni Vitellesco, Cardinal Bessarion, Francesco Spinola, and Battista da Canneto. The King of France had done good service to the Pope by procuring in 1448 the abdication of Felix V. (Amadeus of Savoy), who had been elected Pope by the Council of Basel, and had thus extinguished the last embers of the long schism. It was no doubt to acknowledge and commemorate this service that the Pope desired to let the French king's effigy stand upon the walls of the Vati-

can.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the fresco may have been it has perished entirely, and not a line or shadow exists to help to reveal what it may have been like ; and its destruction is said to have been brought about in this wise.

After Julius II. had been elevated to the Papacy in 1502, the master of the ceremonies suggested, when conducting him through the Vatican, that, before the occupation by the Pope of the residential apartments, the effigies of his predecessor, Alexander VI., ought to be removed from the walls, whereupon the Pope cried out : " And even if the portraits be taken away, will not the very aspect of the rooms themselves be enough to recall the presence of the simoniacal Jew who lately inhabited them ? " Then they showed to the Pope the suite of rooms on the upper floor which—as has already been noticed—had been decorated by Piero della Francesca and Bramantino, and the Pope approved of these apartments, but not of the paintings on the walls. He determined to renew the entire scheme of decoration, and when he had duly matured his plans he summoned to Rome the most celebrated painters of Italy, Signorelli, Perugino, Pinturicchio, and Sodoma, to undertake the work. But soon after they had made a beginning Raphael was introduced to the Pope, and the whole of the aforesaid artists were dismissed, and part of the work they had already completed was taken down to give room for Raphael's compositions. The earlier frescoes done by Piero della Francesca and Bramantino suffered the same fate ; but Raphael showed himself laudably solicitous both for the cause of art and for the

<sup>1</sup> Felibien, " *Entretiens sur les Peintres*," etc. London, 1705, vol. i., p. 121.

feelings of his brother-artists ; wherefore he managed to preserve the work on the ceiling of the Sala dell' Eliodoro done by Perugino, Sodoma, and Peruzzi, and, before removing the frescoes painted by Piero and Bramantino, he caused copies to be made of the same, most likely by the hand of Giulio Romano, who is said to have given them to Paolo Giovio. These copies are supposed to have been the originals of the wood engravings in the Palazzo Giovio at Como,<sup>1</sup> but it is somewhat strange that in the "*Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium*," by Paolo Giovio (Basil., 1571), the name of Carmagnola is the only one of those mentioned by Vasari which appears.

The great fresco which was painted in the Vatican Library, representing Sixtus IV. surrounded by his Cardinals, with a portrait of the learned Platina kneeling in the centre, was for a long time assigned to Piero ; but the evidence which now gives it to his pupil, Melozzo da Forli, is indisputable. During the structural alterations made in the Vatican by Leo XII. this fresco was transferred to canvas and removed to the Pinacoteca, where it now hangs. More than one attempt has been made to show that Piero never visited Rome at all,<sup>2</sup> but there seems to be every reason to accept Vasari's statement in this particular instance, since it is confirmed by the author of an anonymous life of Raphael,<sup>3</sup> who states that Raphael, after he had been called away by the Pope from the work he was engaged upon in Florence to decorate the Vatican, was somewhat annoyed when he

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, vol. ii., p. 492.

<sup>2</sup> Schmarsow, "Melozzo da Forli," p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Angiolo Comolli. Roma, 1791.

arrived in Rome to find that some of the apartments had already been painted and some were in the course of decoration ; Pietro del Borgo, Bramante da Milano, and Il Cortonese (Signorelli) having been amongst the artists called in to execute the work.

Nicolas V., after having initiated his great project, did not divest himself of all control over the painters he had engaged to decorate the Palace of the Vatican. He seems to have detected in Piero qualities and talents which would find more legitimate outlet in the production of a great historical work than in the multiplication of altar-pieces or religious pictures of the sort then in fashion, wherefore he set him to work on the fresco containing the portraits of the King of France and others in the Sala d'Elidoro. In using this discrimination the Pope showed himself to be a sound philosopher, and as capable a judge of art as he was of letters. He saw how asceticism, the manifestation of a frame of mind with which he had little sympathy, was still a potent inspiration in art. In spite of the humanist revival in letters the tradition of Giotto was still the dominant one in painting, which hesitated to deliver any message other than that which religion called for, or to reveal on canvas any aspect of the world in verisimilitude. Pope Nicolas might well have recognized in Piero a disciple of the scientific school, one who was feeling about how he might cast aside for good the constant portrayal of a recognized type, and let his art have free course in the reproduction of the world as he saw it, a fitting champion to war against the revival and perhaps the perpetuation of mediæval sentiment. It is a fact worth noticing that, in the first great work of painting undertaken and

executed under the direction of Nicolas V., there is a perceptible ebb of the mediæval spirit, even though the painter of the same was the devout Angelico da Fiesole himself. Of all Angelico's works those in the chapel of Nicolas V. in the Vatican are the least imbued with the spirit of mediæval asceticism. In the fresco of *St. Stephen preaching*, and in the *Almsgiving of St. Laurence*, the figures are touched with a freedom the painter had seldom used before, and show clearly that their creator had not been unmindful of the methods of Masaccio. Perchance the intellectual contact with a man like the reigning Pope may have hastened the assimilation of Angelico's style to that of the coming men.

## CHAPTER III

### FRESCOES AT AREZZO

**P**IERO'S movements after the termination of his labours in Rome are wrapped in obscurity. Vasari declares that he went from Rome direct to Borgo San Sepolcro on account of the death of his mother; and also to Pesaro, where Galeazzo Malatesta was governor, and to Ancona, where he painted a "Sposalizio" in the Cathedral of San Ciriaco,<sup>1</sup> but there is no work of his extant in either of these places, nor any record to confirm Vasari's statements. In the same way Vasari writes that Piero travelled direct from Loreto to Arezzo to paint with frescoes the chapel of the high altar in the church of San Francesco.

There is no direct evidence which helps to fix the date of this achievement, the most important of Piero's lifetime, and one of the most momentous in the history of painting; but Vasari's statement, which would make it anterior to the execution of the fresco at Rimini, is manifestly erroneous. Only one fact bearing upon the date is known, and this goes no farther than to show that the chapel must have been painted before 1466. This fact appears in a contract made in the year aforesaid between Piero and the Company of the

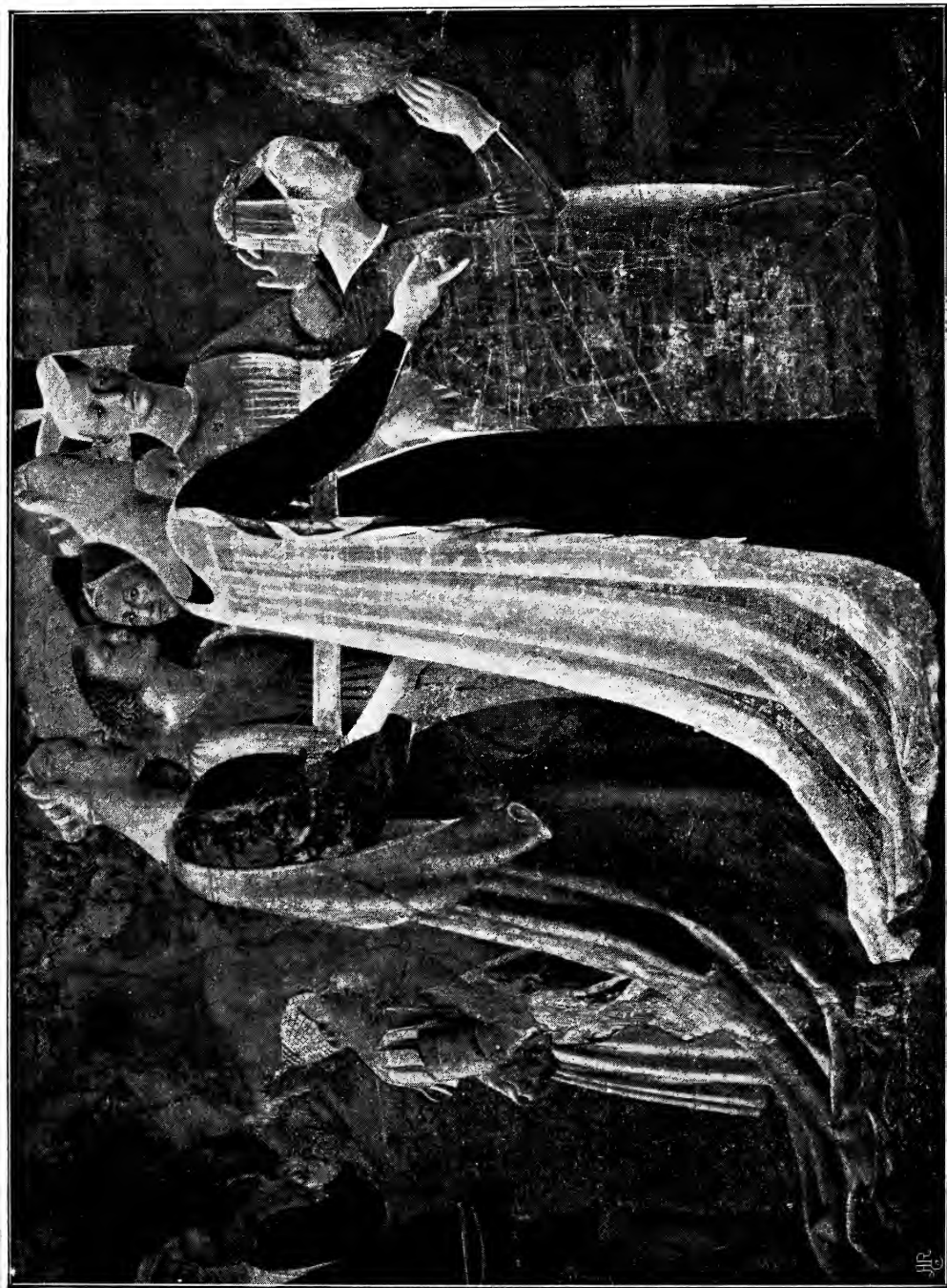
<sup>1</sup> Vasari, vol. ii., p. 498.



Annunziata at Arezzo for the execution of a processional banner, which goes on to state that the balance of the price was paid at Bastia on November 7th, 1468, to "il maestro di dipigniere il quale a dipinto la chupola maggiore di S. Francesco d'Arezzo."

The history of this series of frescoes is as follows: Luigi Bacci, a rich and influential citizen of Arezzo, gave a commission some time after 1446 to Bicci di Lorenzo—the same who had acted as workman assistant to Domenico Veneziano while he was painting his frescoes in Santa Maria Novella at Florence—Piero being his pupil at the same time. This commission was to paint the walls and the ceiling of the Bacci chapel in the church of San Francesco at Arezzo with a series of frescoes. Bicci di Lorenzo was the son of Lorenzo Bicci two painters whose personalities had been mixed up inextricably by Vasari, and it was not until Signor Gaetano Milanesi,<sup>1</sup> by examination of the family records, succeeded in differentiating, partially at least, the work of each painter, that Piero's forerunner in San Francesco was really identified. The father was a pupil of Spinello, and painted most of the Apostles and Saints under the windows in the side chapels of the Duomo at Florence, the son's chief work being the figures of the Evangelists in the church of San Francesco at Prato. Both of them were feeble exponents of the school of Giotto, and it was a great gain to art when the death of Bicci di Lorenzo, in 1452, gave to the patron the opportunity of offering to Piero della Francesca the task of finishing the series of frescoes at Arezzo.

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, vol. ii., p. 61.



*Alinari photo*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo]*

THE RECOGNITION OF THE HOLY TREE BY THE QUEEN OF SHEBA



When Piero began, the roof of the chapel had already been painted with figures of the four Evangelists, and part of the end wall as well. This work was for a long time attributed to Lorenzo Bicci, and Piero was set down as his successor, but Lorenzo Bicci died in 1427; and, whether he painted any of the earlier frescoes in San Francesco or not, it is almost certain that his son was engaged on the work a very little time before his death. The fact that Bicci di Lorenzo died in 1452 has been counted by some writers as a fair ground for inference that, not long after this date, Piero began to paint in San Francesco; for Luigi Bacci, the donor, would naturally desire that the interrupted work should be resumed without delay.

But it does not follow from this that he was able to command the immediate service of the master. All that is known for certain is that the frescoes must have been executed between 1452 and 1466. Within this period certain of Piero's actions may be identified by means of a few scattered dates, but not one of these—save the date of the contract for the Annunziata banner—has any bearing on the time when the frescoes in San Francesco were painted. A work of such magnitude would necessarily take several years to execute; wherefore, to allow for its completion by 1466, it is reasonable to set down a year not later than 1462 for its inception. Schmarsow<sup>1</sup> and Witting<sup>2</sup> write laboriously to prove that 1460-1466 must cover the period in question, urging that, since these frescoes exhibit Piero's highest achievement in composition, it is necessary to assign to them the latest

<sup>1</sup> "Melozzo da Forli," pp. 312-314.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

possible epoch in his art career, but they bring forward no valid proof to show that Piero might not have been as accomplished a master of composition in 1452 as in 1460.

The legend of the *Discovery of the Holy Cross* was one of the subjects chosen for treatment. During his stay in Florence Piero would almost certainly have seen the interpretation of the same theme by Agnolo Gaddi in the Cappella Baroncelli of the church of Santa Croce. In each case the painter has chosen the version of the story as set forth in the "Golden Legend," which tells how Adam, being at the point of death, begs Seth to procure the oil of mercy for extreme unction from the angels who guard Paradise. Seth, when he applies for the oil, hears from the Archangel Michael that it can only be obtained after the lapse of ages—defining the period as one corresponding with the interval between the Fall and the Atonement. Seth receives, instead of the oil, a small branch of the tree of knowledge, and is told that, when it should bear fruit, Adam would recover. On his return Seth finds Adam dead, and plants the branch on his tomb. The sapling grew to a tree, which flourished till the time of Solomon, who caused it to be hewn down for the purposes of building. The workmen, however, found such difficulty in adapting it that it was thrown aside, and used as a footbridge over a stream of water. When the Queen of Sheba, the type of the Gentiles, was about to cross this water she saw a vision of the Saviour on the Cross, and knelt in adoration, and afterwards told Solomon that when a certain one would be suspended on that tree the fall of the Jewish nation should be near. Solomon, in alarm, buried the fatal wood deep in the



*Alinari photo]*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo*

HEADS OF WOMEN FROM THE FRESCO OF THE QUEEN  
OF SHEBA RECOGNIZING THE HOLY TREE



earth, on the very same spot where in after times the pool of Bethesda was formed. Immediately before the Crucifixion the tree rose and floated on the surface of the water ; it was then taken out, and served to form the Cross.

Piero followed the scheme of Agnolo Gaddi with slight variations. In the lunette on the upper part of the right-hand wall of the chapel, the death and burial of Adam are portrayed in two distinct compositions, the lunette being divided by a tree. In the section to the right Adam is supported by Eve, whose figure is marred by the repulsive deformities of old age, and in front of him stands an old man with a beard. Two young men complete the group, the nude figure of the young man leaning upon a staff being strongly suggestive of classic inspiration. On the left the scene of the burial, which is much damaged, is full of dramatic power. The drawing of the heads shows some of Piero's finest work, and several of the figures are in vigorous action. In the space beneath this lunette are two frescoes, one representing the sacred nature of the tree, which does duty as a bridge for the Queen of Sheba to pass over, and the other the reception of the queen by Solomon. The first of these is composed with consummate skill, and the execution is equally fine. The men guarding the horses and the horses themselves are vigorous and full of life, and the kneeling queen and the group of ladies around her are drawn with a grace not to be surpassed. The sense of open air and the luxuriant foliage are rendered with admirable fidelity. In the fresco to the right of this, the queen is received by Solomon under a finely



drawn portico, the figures of the courtiers and of the ladies in the foreground being especially graceful and stately.

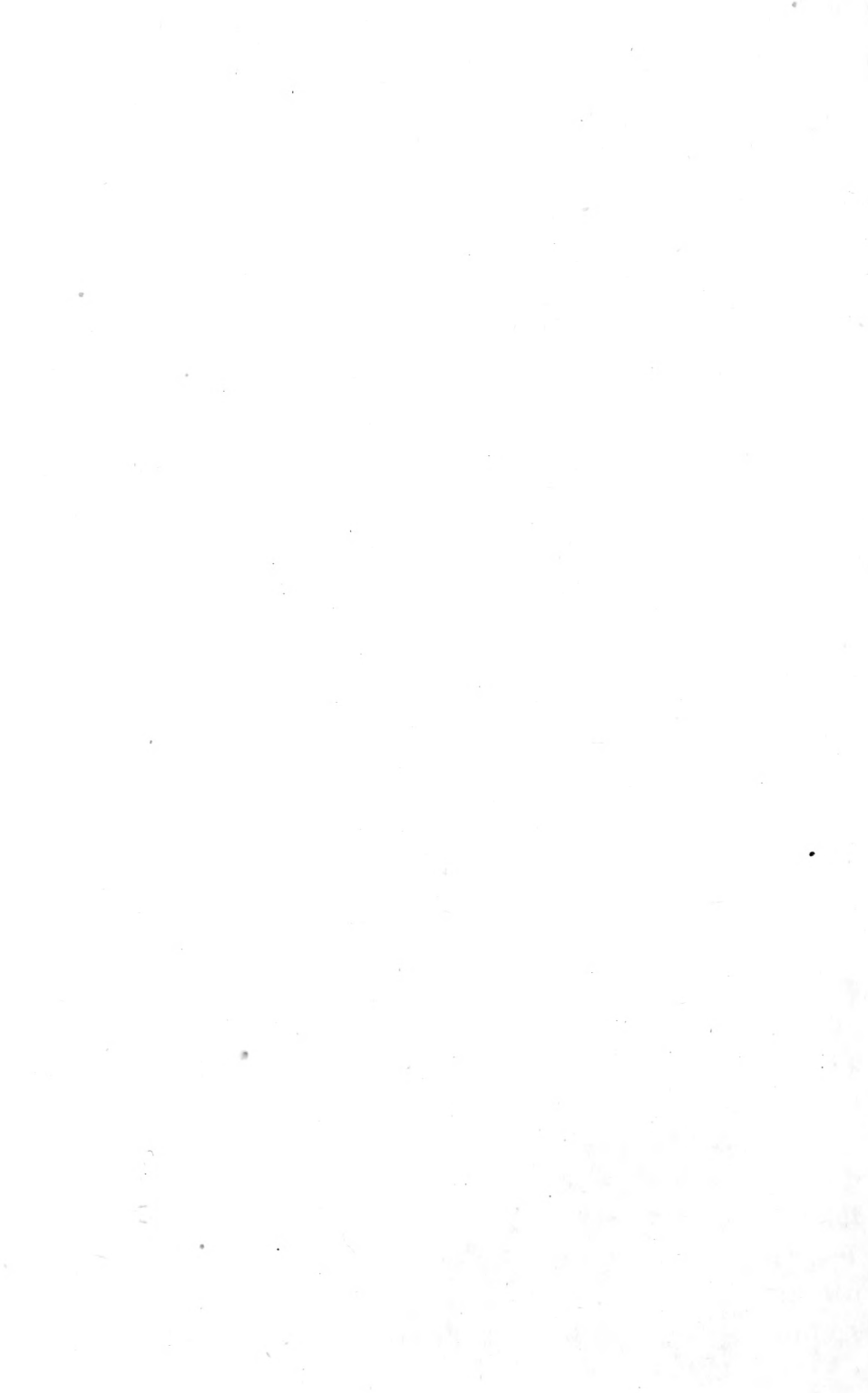
Below, the whole width of the wall is filled with the great battle picture, *The Victory of Constantine over Maxentius*, in the composition of which Piero achieved a triumph of artistic arrangement. In the piteous ruin which has fallen upon it, the almost entire obliteration of the right-hand group throws the whole scheme out of balance, and renders it difficult to realize what the effect of the complete composition must have been. Of the group on the left more has escaped destruction. Here the horses are full of life and admirably drawn, and the grouping of the mail-clad soldiers, the disposition of the uplifted spears and banners and plumed helmets, the gestures of the warriors, and the agitation depicted on the few countenances which are preserved, are all rendered with a verisimilitude and a dramatic force which proclaim the birth of a new era in art, and show how vastly Piero was in advance of his contemporaries. On the corresponding space on the opposite wall is pictured *The Battle between Heraclius and Chosroes, King of Persia, for the recovery of the Cross*. Here again classic feeling is strongly manifested in the figure of the soldier who attacks his foe on the right of the fresco. The Tartar who seizes a soldier by the hair, and the horses kicking and plunging, are carefully drawn, but there is all through a certain lack of movement. The picture gives an impression that here Piero has let himself be swayed unduly by the impersonal impulse. A little less detachment, a little more of himself thrown into the composition would have helped to produce a much



*Alinari photo*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo]*

THE DEFEAT AND DEATH OF CHOSROES, KING OF PERSIA.



more effective result. In the right-hand corner is the figure of Chosroes kneeling before the executioner, who is preparing to decapitate him.

Above the *Battle of Heraclius* are two frescoes which represent the finding of the Cross on Calvary by St. Helena, while digging the foundations of a new church. In the left-hand portion the figure of the man who lifts the Cross out of the hole in the ground is most lifelike, and in the background a town of Italian type represents Jerusalem. On the right the miraculous powers of the Cross are manifested by the cure of a sick man, and here, in the disposition of the figures, Piero has outdone all his forerunners. In the lunette above, Heraclius is bearing the Cross back to Jerusalem. The Emperor in his purple robe is a stately figure, and the faces of his attendants exhibit that majestic comeliness which is Piero's most delightful characteristic. On the left pillar which supports the arch of the chapel are figures of a cupid, a bishop, and St. Peter Martyr. On the right is a fragment, the head of an angel, with one of the loveliest faces Piero ever painted.

The frescoes on the end or eastern wall of the chapel have suffered greatly from damp, especially in the upper portion. Here, on each side of the window, is painted a finely conceived figure; the one on the right, which is almost ruined, being set down as Jeremiah, and that on the left as St. John the Evangelist; but as neither of them bears any distinctive emblem, the name of any other prophet or apostle would be equally appropriate. The last-named, indeed, has the conventional blond hair and the gentle aspect of St. John, and by the gesture of his left hand seems to be in the act of preaching. Below

these are two frescoes: on the right a representation of what might be either the raising of the Cross or the concealment of the tree of life by the command of Solomon. The figures of the men are gracefully drawn, and Schmarzow<sup>1</sup> has found in their treatment a lightness of touch which suggests to him the style of Melozzo da Forlì rather than that of his master. The subject of the corresponding fresco to the left of the window is somewhat difficult to determine, but it is probably meant to represent the extrication of Judas from the pit into which he had been cast, by means of a mechanical engine. Only half his form appears, and an officer standing by has seized him by the hair, and, from the expression of terror on the traitor's face, seems to be threatening him with further punishment.

Below these two are two more frescoes, that on the right being the famous one of *The Appearance of the Angel to Constantine in a Dream*. The Emperor is lying in his tent with a sleeping attendant by the bedside, while two guards, tall, stately figures, keep watch at the entrance. Above, Piero has painted the angel swooping down from the left, but the damp has worked such ruin that nothing of it except one wing can now be distinguished. A bright light, presumably radiating from the body of the celestial visitor, illuminates the bed and the sleeping Emperor, and is brilliantly reflected in the helmets and greaves of the guards who stand unconscious of the supernatural manifestation. The deep dark and the high light are very strongly contrasted, but all sense of clash is avoided by the extraordinary

<sup>1</sup> "Melozzo da Forlì," p. 313.



*Alinari photo*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo]*

## THE INVENTION AND VERIFICATION OF THE HOLY CROSS





*Alinari photo*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo]*

A DETAIL FROM THE FRESCO OF THE INVENTION AND VERIFICATION  
OF THE HOLY CROSS





subtlety of gradation. At one stride Piero seems to have grasped the whole secret of chiaroscuro ; the figure of the dozing attendant marks the point in which his energies accomplished their greatest triumph ; and, even in its present faded condition, stands out as an example of unsurpassable dexterity.

To the left of *The Vision of Constantine* is a fresco of the Annunciation, one of Piero's least happy attempts in this great series. The composition is clumsy ; the figure of the Virgin is stiff and lifeless ; the angel wants the grace with which Piero has invested the celestial messenger in the altar-piece in the Pinacoteca at Perugia ; but the face drawn in profile is a very lovely one. The portico under which the Virgin stands is exactly in the style of those in the *Flagellation* at Urbino, and in the fresco of *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* already noticed.

The contrast between Piero's rendering of the legend of the Cross and Gaddi's is strongly marked. Gaddi knew how to use the brush, he was skilled in the combination of colours, and, though his drawing is in the main defective, many of his figures taken separately are graceful ; some are even majestic and endowed with the sense of movement. His draperies are well disposed in broad shapely folds. Moreover, taking into consideration the age in which he painted, Gaddi shows great adroitness in producing the effect of distance, though he is naturally far inferior in this respect to Piero with his equipment of scientific knowledge.

Guesses as to the mental attitude of a painter, while he may have been engaged over a particular work, are greatly the fashion at the present time under the style of

the "Psychology of Art." While recognizing the excesses to which this practice may be carried, we may occasionally adopt it, and in the present instance hazard a surmise as to the diverse currents of will which may have moved the hands of these two painters during the time when they were engaged in illustrating the legend of the Cross. In Gaddi's case, examination seems to show that the story itself and its mystic associations were the supreme object of his endeavour; while with Piero there is conveyed a suggestion that the legend served simply as a theme in the illustration of which he was able to exhibit his skill in producing a set of studies in composition, in colour, and in anatomy. He stands before us as a painter of religious subjects, rather than as a religious painter.

To digress a moment on the subject of composition, it is here that his vast superiority to Gaddi will be made manifest. Gaddi's figures in Santa Croce are spread over the wall, not unpleasing objects in themselves, but the necessary interdependence, the arrangement of lines, and the legitimate succession of planes in aerial perspective are wanting, and the frescoes in the Baroncelli chapel, though they are a sincere expression of the significance of the legend, cannot, as achievements of art, be placed anywhere near Piero's work in San Francesco. In this particular set of creations Piero seems to have developed and brought to their highest point those qualities which give distinction to his method.

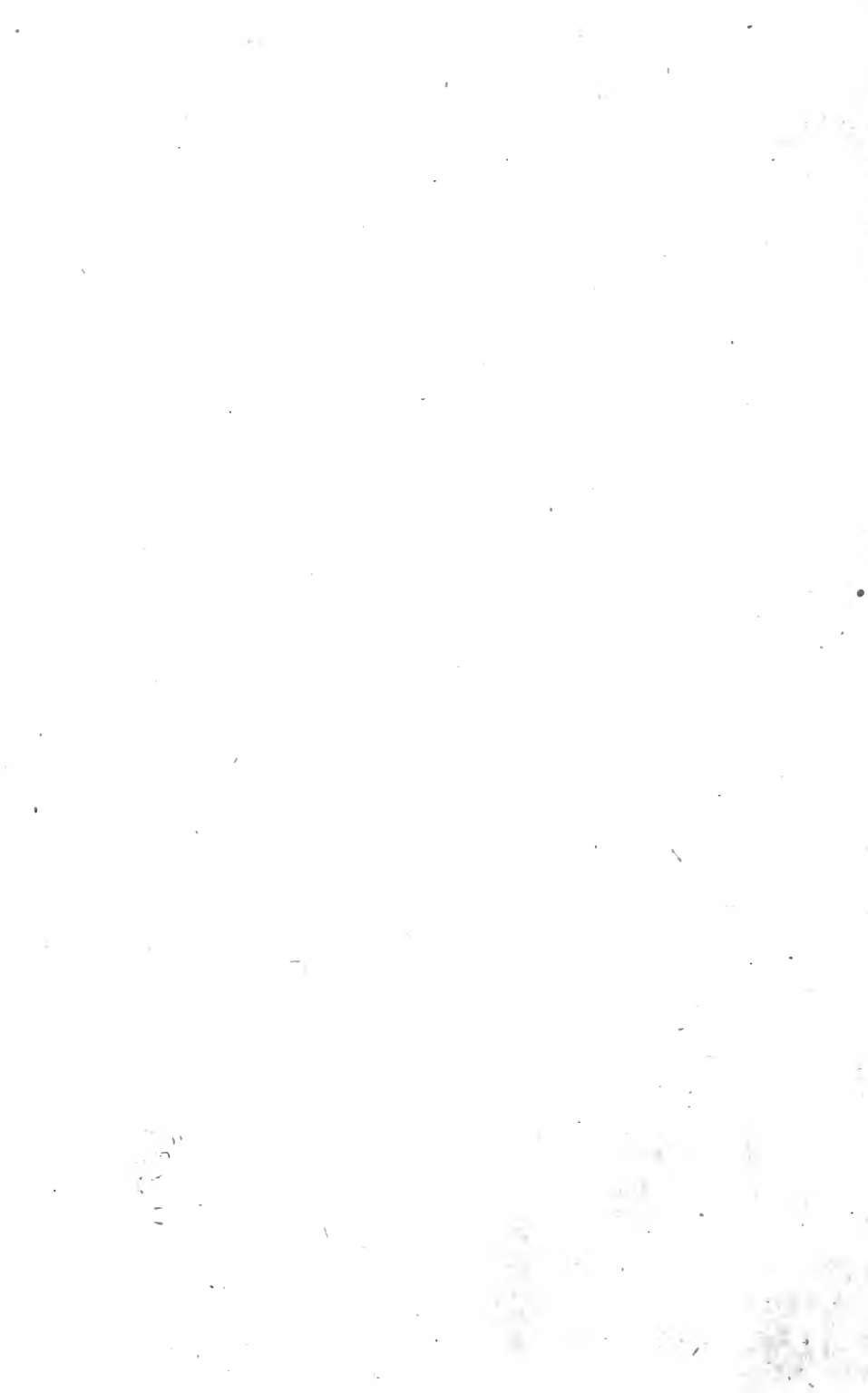
With the exception of Masaccio, not one of the Florentine painters had approached him in the skill and knowledge he used in disposing the figures in the



*Alinari photo]*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo*

BEARING THE WOOD OF THE HOLY CROSS



picture space. The startling sense of reality we gather from the study of the frescoes in San Francesco is brought about as much by the dexterous relief of appropriate masses of light and shade, as by presentation of correct degrees of tone in due contiguity. It is almost impossible for the eye to form an accurate judgment as to the dimensions and shapes of objects, unless it shall have acquired previously the faculty of balancing real forms and dimensions with those which are merely apparent, and the relations between these two classes of phenomena can be much more easily apprehended by one whose eye has been scientifically trained. Piero was emphatically the first of the scientific realists. It is incorrect to include in this class Leo Battista Alberti, who arranged the angles and adjusted the planes of his drawings by the help of his famous perspective glass ; or Paolo Uccello, who muddled his composition through working entirely by rule of thumb ; or even Brunelleschi, colossal as his achievement was. Piero's title to fame as a scientific draughtsman lies in the fact that he first grasped the principles underlying the empiric method followed by his predecessors, and, having given them lucid exposition, handed down these principles expressed as scientific truths.

In considering as a whole the frescoes painted by Piero in San Francesco, the fact most worthy of note is that we have here for the first time a serious endeavour to represent, by a hand and an intelligence scientifically trained, certain great secular dramatic scenes of historic significance, and though the history involved may be ancillary to religion, these productions of Piero's mark a long step in advance of the mental attitude which

idealized and produced the Crucifixions and Madonnas and Saints of Giotto and his followers ; the only subjects—with a few exceptions—recognized as fitted for treatment by the pre-Renaissance painters. The exceptions which will be the most familiar are the frescoes representing the effects of good and bad government by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Palazzo Pubblico at Siena, which were painted in 1337. Piero, it is manifest, had studied a language unknown to the primitive masters, and had gathered the secrets of a world to them unfamiliar. If the decoration of San Francesco at Assisi be taken to represent the summary of the artistic effort of the age of Duccio and Giotto, here, in San Francesco at Arezzo, we stand before a further triumph of illustration, enriched by an experience more extended, and set forth by a hand instructed by that all-subduing knowledge which the churchman-patron had not yet learnt to dread.

It has already been remarked how great is the advance which these pictures show in the principles of composition beyond any other work which Piero had hitherto produced. To give in detail a few illustrations, it may be said that never before had energetic action been so skilfully portrayed ; never had the sense of motion been so vividly realized as in the floundering horse of Maxentius and the waving banners in the *Battle of Constantine* ; and in the same fresco the consideration of scenic effect, shown by the sharp division of the two groups of the composition, stamps the picture as a triumph of artistic arrangement. In the *Vision* Piero reaches his highest point as a master of light and dark ; no finer achievements can be ascribed to him in ana-



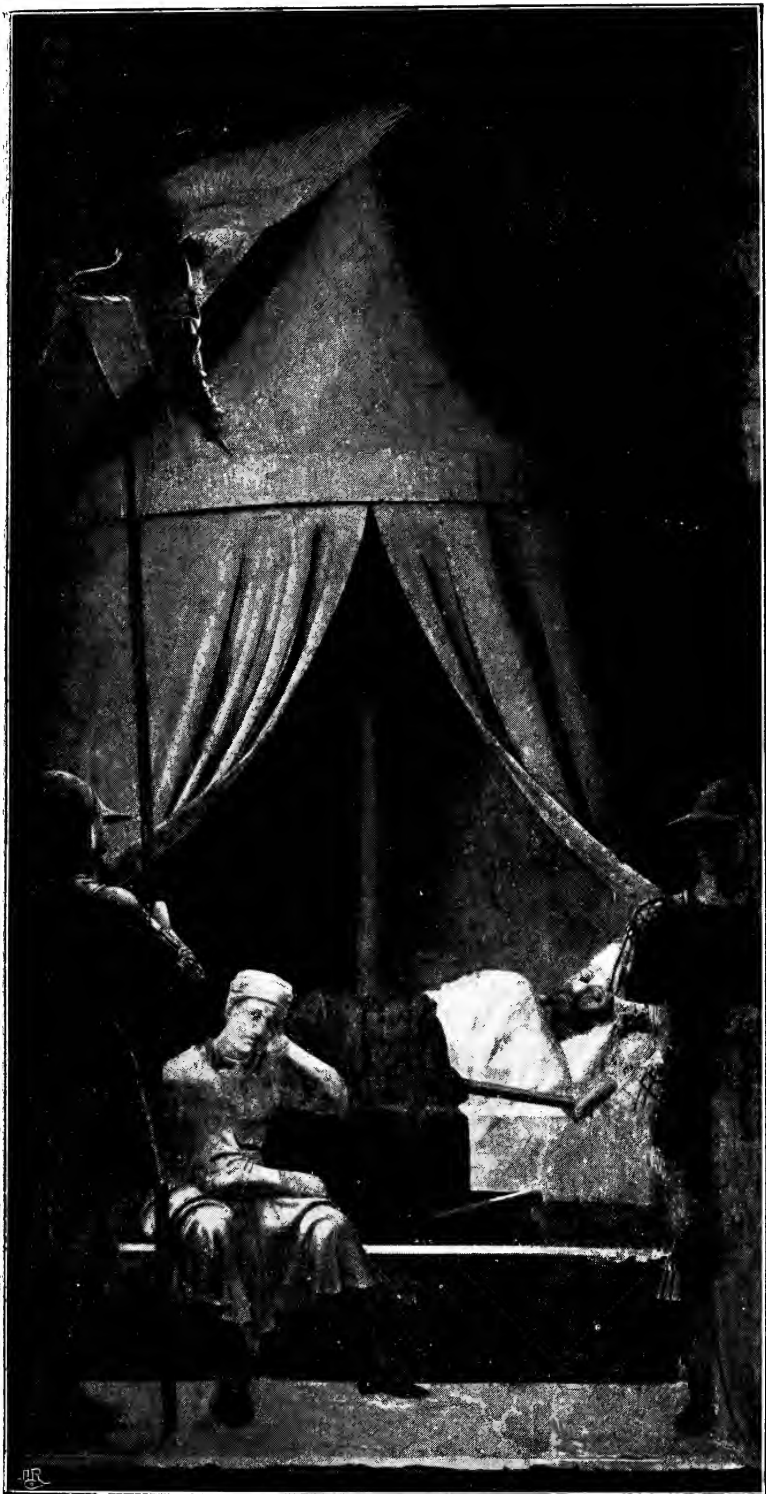
*Alinari photo]*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo*

JUDAS DRAWN UP FROM THE PIT







*Alinari photo]*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo*

## THE VISION OF CONSTANTINE



tomical study than those in the *Burial of Adam*; and in the *Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* he makes manifest how complete was his knowledge and how correct his eye as to the relative value of colours, and of the due arrangement of the same.

## CHAPTER IV

### WORKS AT BORGO SAN SEPOLCRO

**I**N addition to the great series in San Francesco, Piero painted in the cathedral at Arezzo what is now one of his best preserved frescoes, a noble standing figure of *St. Mary Magdalen*. It is painted on the wall just beside the little door which leads into the sacristy. The saint is taken almost full face; the figure is drawn with a marvellous freedom and firmness of line, the treatment adumbrating the great linear triumphs of Signorelli; the handling of the folds of the drapery is careful and accurate, and the colour is harmonious. The beauty of her face and figure is of that stately sumptuous type which has always been accounted her attribute, but the purity and simplicity of Piero's style has kept the figure entirely free from the enticing full-blooded traits with which the late painters almost always endowed her, and thus made it difficult to admit her effigy to a church, and impossible to let it serve as an altar-piece. With Piero's treatment the notion of chastity and modesty is evoked by this figure as powerfully as by any picture of Saint or Virgin Martyr in the writhings of contrition. She holds up her robe with her right hand, and with her left presses to her breast the alabaster jar of spiced ointment. The fresco is in a fair state of preservation, being restored only in the lower part.



*Alinari photo]*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo*

## THE ANNUNCIATION





*Alinari photo*

*[Cathedral, Arezzo]*

ST. MARY MAGDALEN





The history of the Magdalen in art is a very interesting one. The spirit in which the painters of different eras have touched her, has varied greatly according to the circumstances and sentiment of the times. In the middle ages she appears rather as a sacred personage than as a saint, and up to the fifteenth century she is rarely represented, save as a subordinate figure of a group. Signor Pichi<sup>1</sup> in his book gives currency to an assertion to the effect that this effigy by Piero in the cathedral of Arezzo, where she is portrayed with the signs of penitence upon her and touched with sadness, is the first instance when the Magdalen is represented as a single figure. This statement is surely a little wide of the mark, for the writer seems to have overlooked the Italo-Byzantine painting of the *Penitent Magdalen* in the Belle Arti at Florence. This picture, from its great size, could never have been designed for a place over an altar; indeed, it was almost certainly painted before 1280, the date when the cultus of the Magdalen was authorized by Pope Nicolas IV. The mediæval sentiment concerning the Magdalen seems to have survived down to Piero's time, for here he has shrunk from giving her a prominent position in the church, and placed her designedly in a secluded corner, instead of letting her dominate an altar or adorn a screen. Another single figure of *St. Mary Magdalen*, by Hugo van der Goes, is in the Royal Institution at Liverpool.

A fresco at one time attributed to Piero is painted on a staircase of the Palazzo Comunale at Arezzo, and this no doubt is the one mentioned by Vasari as having

<sup>1</sup> "Vita," p. 60.

been painted in the church of Santa Maria della Pieve, the church in question being now a portion of the Municipio. It is a Madonna with two saints, and local tradition, without any warrant, assigns to it the date of 1483. Certain characteristics of the fresco suggest that it may have been executed by that Lorentino di Agnolo who, according to Vasari, painted many pictures in Arezzo, imitating Piero's style, and finished certain works which the master had left incomplete. Vasari says that other frescoes, also attributed to Piero, are to be found in San Francesco (a figure of Santa Rosalia) in San Bernardo, and in San Domenico.

With regard to Piero's sojourn in Arezzo, there are extant two documents bearing upon the same: a receipt of the date of December 20th, 1466, by which Piero di Benedetto acknowledges to have received from Cosmè di Nanni, an officer of the Company of the Annunziata in that city, ten golden florins on account of a banner which he had painted for the aforesaid association, and another receipt, dated November 7th, 1468, and executed at Bastia, a village between Arezzo and Borgo San Sepolcro, with respect to twenty golden florins, the balance of the sum due for the said banner, and paid to the painter by Benedetto di Giovanni della Valle. This banner has disappeared, and nothing is known of the fate it ultimately suffered. It by no means follows that Piero was residing in Arezzo while he was engaged on painting the banner, or that he remained there uninterruptedly from the beginning to the end of his commission in San Francesco. It is an easy journey of twenty-four miles from Arezzo to San Sepolcro. From 1452 onwards he most likely spent a good portion of his

time in his native city, and painted most of the frescoes and other works which still survive there and in the adjacent parts. Like many others of the great masters, Piero was an erratic worker, and would sometimes put his paintings aside for months or even years at a time. An instance of this irregularity may be found in the long interval between the first payment on account of the Annunziata banner in 1466 and the final settlement in 1468.

Vasari goes on to say that at this time Piero painted at Borgo San Sepolcro a fresco in Pieve di Santa Maria <sup>1</sup> (here he evidently means the church now known as Sant' Agostino) and another <sup>2</sup> in Sant' Agostino, here intending to signify the church which the Augustinians occupied until 1555, when they migrated to Pieve di Santa Maria, and gave over their church to the nuns of Santa Chiara, this church being called Santa Chiara at the present day. Vasari assigns also to this period a figure of the *Madonna della Misericordia* in the hospital (which he calls a fresco) and the great fresco of the *Resurrection of Christ* in one of the apartments of the Palazzo dei Conservatori.

It has been already remarked that Piero, having been summoned to Rome by Nicolas V., must have gone there between the years 1447 and 1455, only one intermediate date, 1451, the year when he painted the fresco at Rimini, being fixed. The death of Bicci di Lorenzo

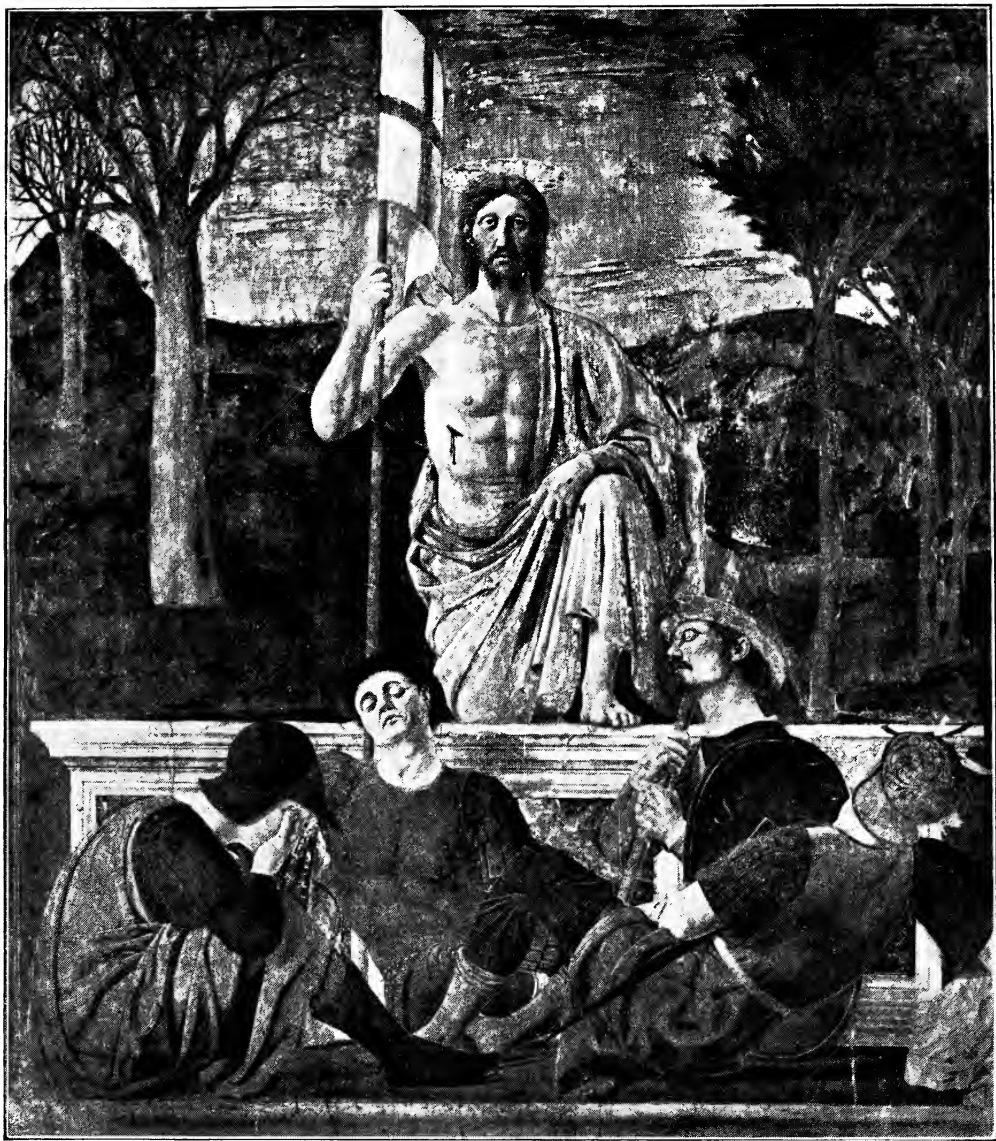
<sup>1</sup> "E Nella Pieve fece a fresco dentro all a porta del Mezzo due Santi che sono tenuti cosa bellissima" ("Vita," vol. ii., p. 493). Milanesi says that this fresco was found in good condition when the church was restored, "negli anni passati." No trace of it however now exists.

<sup>2</sup> *The Assumption of the Virgin* noticed on page 50.

in 1452, and the consequent interruption of the work on the frescoes in San Francesco at Arezzo, make it possible that Piero may have taken up the work there in 1452 or shortly afterwards. With regard to his stay in Rome, the balance of probability—as it has been noted already—is in favour of the earlier portion of the pontificate of Pope Nicolas. He may quite naturally have gone to Rome from Loreto, where he was in 1446-1447, and then have halted at Rimini on his journey northwards. Of his visit to Rimini Vasari makes no mention at all.

The adoption of this hypothesis would therefore bring Piero back to his birthplace in 1453 or shortly after. Vasari groups together all the works of Piero which now exist in Borgo San Sepolcro and certain others of which there is no surviving record, as if he wished to imply that all these were painted during the stay which Piero made in the city after his mother's death. But there is no reason why the production of these works—and of some other genuine ones unnoticed by Vasari—should not have been spread over the whole of the period lying between 1451 and 1469, the date last named having been settled, with a fair amount of certainty, as the one when he paid his first visit to Urbino.

However, to avoid repetition, it will be convenient to deal with this Borgo San Sepolcro group of pictures as they stand, without any considerations of chronological sequence. Amongst them will be found examples of his work, showing the utmost diversity both in treatment and in medium of production. [If the frescoes in San Francesco at Arezzo are the works most interesting in the history of the development of art that Piero has left, the *Resurrection of Christ* in the Palazzo dei Con-




*Alinari photo]*

*[Municipio, Borgo San Sepolcro*

## THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST



servatori, now the Sala Comunale at Borgo San Sepolcro, is unquestionably the strongest manifestation of his power, the creation upon which rests his most valid title to immortal fame. 

From the first moment that the eye of the spectator alights upon it the spell of Piero's genius begins to work; but it must not be imagined that the charm begins with soft invocations of gentle flowing lines and rich and harmonious colour. It is quite possible that the first sense may be one of painful shock. The thing we see on the wall before us resembles no other rendering of the Resurrection we have ever yet beheld or dreamt of. The nerves are assailed with a harsh and even lacerating touch, as when a strident fault of harmony mars the climax of some triumph of sound. The sprawling forms of the soldiers, the ragged trees, the amorphous hills in the background, and beyond all those terrible eyes of the central figure fixed in their sockets and overpowering all else in the composition by their stony regard, provoke no thrill at the consciousness of beauty revealed; nay, there may very likely surge up a sense of revulsion and disappointment. But not one in a thousand of those who may have taken upon themselves the trouble of a journey to Borgo San Sepolcro, will have stood for five minutes before the fresco without feeling that, as this presentment of the Resurrection differs in character from all others, so it exceeds them all in power and originality; indeed, in these respects it yields to few or any of the pictures of the world.

In composition it is extremely simple. The figures fall naturally into triangular form, and indicate the



geometrical training of his hand and eye. In the foreground four soldiers lie sleeping, some of them in very uneasy attitudes. Those to the right and the left are handsome, fair youths ; between them is a dark man facing the spectator, who is understood to be a likeness of the painter himself. His face is a consummate achievement of skilful modelling and an absolutely faithful rendering of a sleeping man both in pose and in expression. The fourth soldier holds a spear, and has a neck of abnormal length and no lower part to his body. The tomb, classic in design and made of marble, stretches almost across the picture, and from it rises Christ, partially clad in a pink robe and bearing in his hand a flagstaff. Round his head is something which at a first glance seems to be a halo ; but the pink markings on it, which examination discloses, suggest that probably in its original form it bore a suggestion of one of those rose garlands which Piero loved to place upon the heads of his angels and saints. His left foot rests upon the edge of the tomb, and is a most exquisite piece of drawing, and one which will hardly fall in with the description of the picture by Crowe and Cavalcaselle (ii. 540, ed. 1864), which sets down that "the extremities are coarse and common."<sup>1</sup> The landscape at the back resembles strongly that in *The Baptism of Christ* in the National Gallery and that in the *St. Jerome* in the Accademia at Venice. The sky is streaked with clouds,

<sup>1</sup> Dr. F. Witting also finds fault with this foot, and declares (*op. cit.*, p. 107) that it has so little connection with the figure that it looks like a separate stand made to exhibit the grave clothes. This criticism is manifestly an amplification of Vasari's statement that Piero was in the habit of draping plaster figures and using them as models (vol. ii., p. 498).

reddened by the rays of the ascending sun, and begins itself to glow with the saffron tint of dawn on Christ's left hand. On this same side, the side of the rising sun and of rekindling life, the trees are green and full of leaf, while on the opposite one they are bare and dead. Perhaps there is here a touch of symbolism of death and rebirth, perhaps too the roses round the head may be an illustration of the myth of the blossoming of the crown of thorns.

The chief attribute of the figure of Christ, taken by itself, is an expression of irresistible force. This perfectly developed organism, this splendid and robust manifestation of muscular strength, rises from the tomb to bring salvation and liberty to the world, and we feel, as we contemplate, that any effort to resist the calm onward sweep would be as vain as the interposition of the fragile wing with which Love seeks to bar the entrance of Death on Watts' great canvas. The conquering Christ which Piero has here realized puts to shame the agonized, shapeless figures of his earlier Central Italian predecessors. Christ here bears the similitude of the perfect man, dignified and majestic. The sentiment and conscience of the onlooker are dominated by a novel manifestation of artistic expression, one of the first signs, since the revival, that the hand of man had learnt how to act by regulated knowledge, instead of giving out mechanical imitations of a misconceived type. Powerful and unique as is the effect produced on the spectator by this great picture, it is nevertheless impossible to judge therefrom whether or not Piero was a man strongly affected by religious sentiment, and whether he was capable of feeling the

reverential awe with which the picture undoubtedly fills the majority of those who view it. There is no doubt that the scene presented is the one he idealized, faithfully reproduced, but whether he set it forth with the design of letting the religious element in his work react upon the spectator, we can never know. The Christ is drawn from the same model who served for the Christ in the *Baptism* in the National Gallery, and for the St. John the Baptist in the altar-piece in the Accademia at Perugia. Lanzi, who wrote at the end of the eighteenth century, describes several of Piero's works in Borgo San Sepolcro, but says nothing about the *Resurrection*, and a reason for this omission is forthcoming. A careful examination of the fresco has revealed the fact that it must at one time have been covered with a thick coat of plaster. Round the sides portions of the plaster yet remain, and bear traces of a decorative pattern—a sort of arabesque of flowers and scrolls which was painted on it. Moreover, upon the fresco itself are to be found marks of the tools used in removing the plaster. It was no doubt thus concealed at the date when Lanzi visited the city; but there is no extant record to show when the plaster was taken off. M. Eugene Müntz<sup>1</sup> has drawn attention to a resemblance between the Christ in this fresco and the Christ in a small picture by Mantegna now in the museum at Tours. The Tours picture formed a portion of the predella of the great Mantegna in San Zeno at Verona, and was left in France when the rest of Napoleon's theft was restored. Both figures are on the point of emerging from tombs of similar

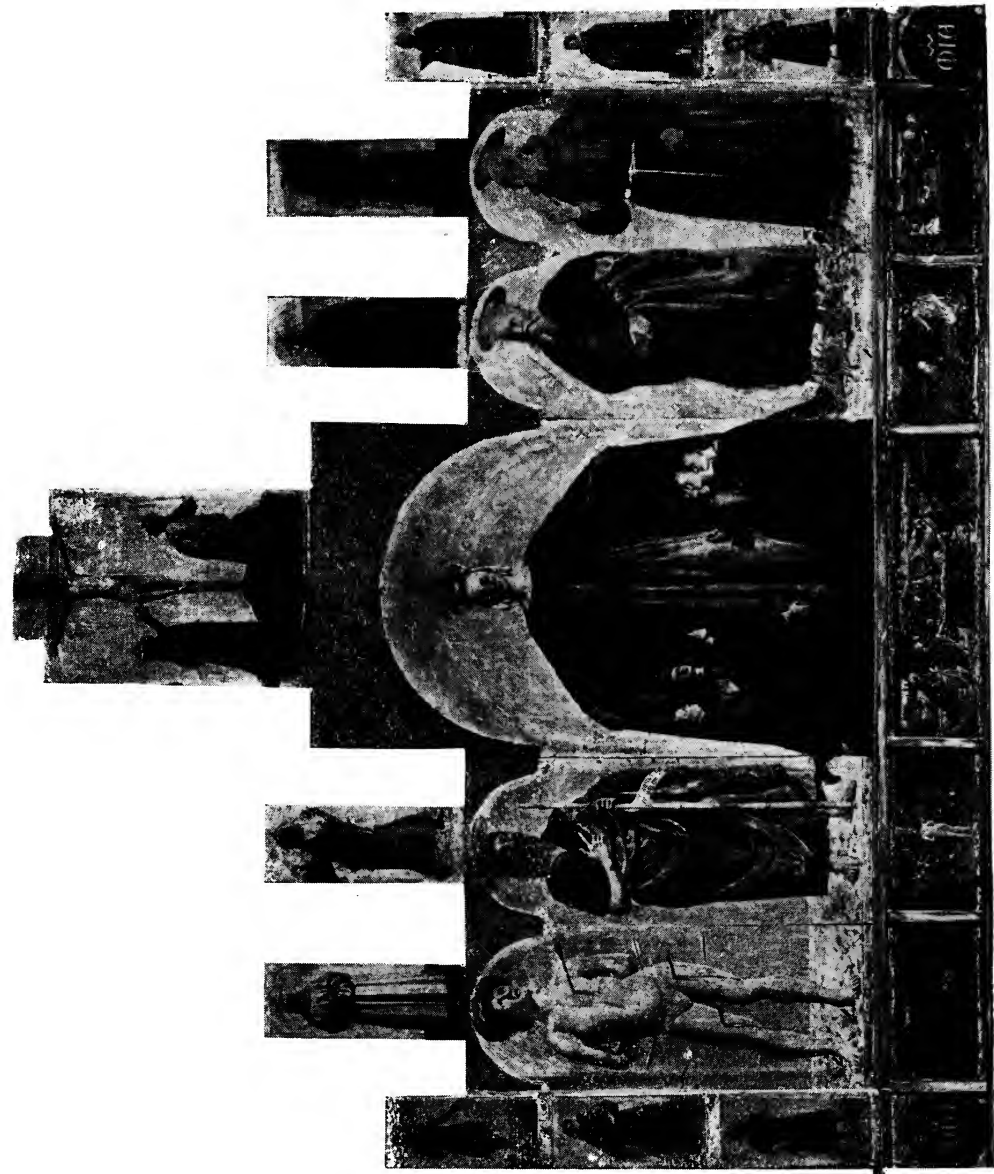
<sup>1</sup> "Archivio Storico dell' Arte," July, 1889 (Rome).

design, and have the left foot placed on the edge of the sepulchre. Both bear flags, and the draperies are disposed over the figure in the same fashion. But Mantegna has placed the flag in the left hand of his Christ, who is raising the right in the act of benediction. M. Müntz is satisfied that the composition of the fragment at Tours gives evidence of careful study by Mantegna of Piero's style, but his criticism loses much of its value from the fact that Mantegna painted the San Zeno picture about 1457, before his sojourn in Mantua. Under these circumstances it is scarcely possible that any part of it could have been inspired by Piero's work.

## CHAPTER V

### BORGIO SAN SEPOLCRO AND MONTERCHIO

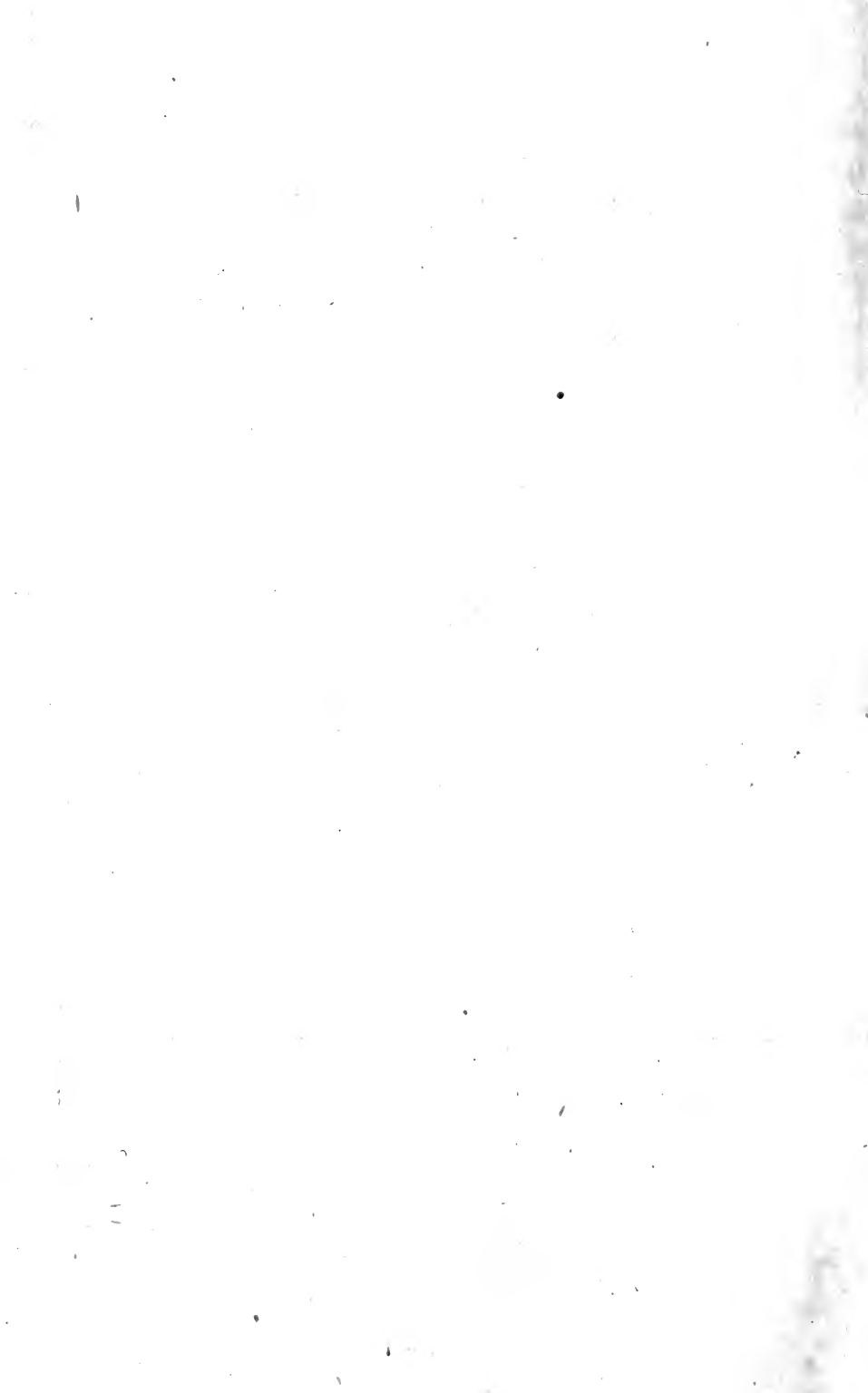
MUCH controversy has arisen over the authenticity of the altar-piece, the *Assumption of the Virgin*, now in the church of Santa Chiara at San Sepolcro. A commission was given to Piero on October 4th, 1454, for a picture answering to the description of this one for the sum of 320 florins, the price to be paid partly in money and partly in certain pieces of land, the painter binding himself to complete the same within eight years under a formal contract, drawn up by Ser Bartolommeo Fedeli, a notary of Borgo San Sepolcro; which writings are now in the Archivio Generale dei Contratti at Florence. On November 14th, 1469, Piero gave a receipt to the Augustinian friars for the balance due to him, the instrument having been drawn up by Ser Lionardo Fedeli of San Sepolcro—a fact which is scarcely in keeping with the theory that Piero may have begun the picture and that someone else may have completed it. In this composition the Virgin is ascending to Heaven surrounded by angels. San Francesco, San Girolamo, San Ludovico, and Santa Chiara stand below, and the Apostles occupy the background. This picture throughout is so entirely foreign to Piero's style that scarcely a voice has been given in support of its



*Alinari photo*

*[Church of the Hospital, Borgo San Sepolcro]*

ALTAR-PIECE OF THE MADONNA DELLA MISERICORDIA



authenticity,' in spite of the documentary evidence in its favour, which seems quite clear and convincing. Piero may have varied his manner occasionally, but he could scarcely have varied it enough to allow this picture to be assigned to him. Cavalcaselle attributes it to Francesco da Città di Castello, a painter strongly influenced by Perugino, and throughout the picture resemblances to Perugino's style are abundantly manifest. The perfectly regular documentary evidence and the style of the picture are so strongly contradictory that much discussion has arisen and many attempts have been made to explain the incongruity; but no serious defence of Piero's authorship seems possible. It may be remarked that the framework of the altar-piece has been cut and modified to make it fit its present place; possibly it may have been substituted for the original work by Piero, and no record made of the change.

The altar-piece of the *Madonna della Misericordia*, in the chapel of the hospital at Borgo San Sepolcro, is almost certainly the earliest of Piero's extant pictures. In form and arrangement it follows the style of similar works painted by Fra Angelico in Cortona and Perugia. By the terms of the contract Piero was allowed from 1445 to 1448 to complete the work, the price thereof being 150 gold florins. According to Cavalcaselle, the subjects on the predella are painted in tempera, and all the rest in oil.

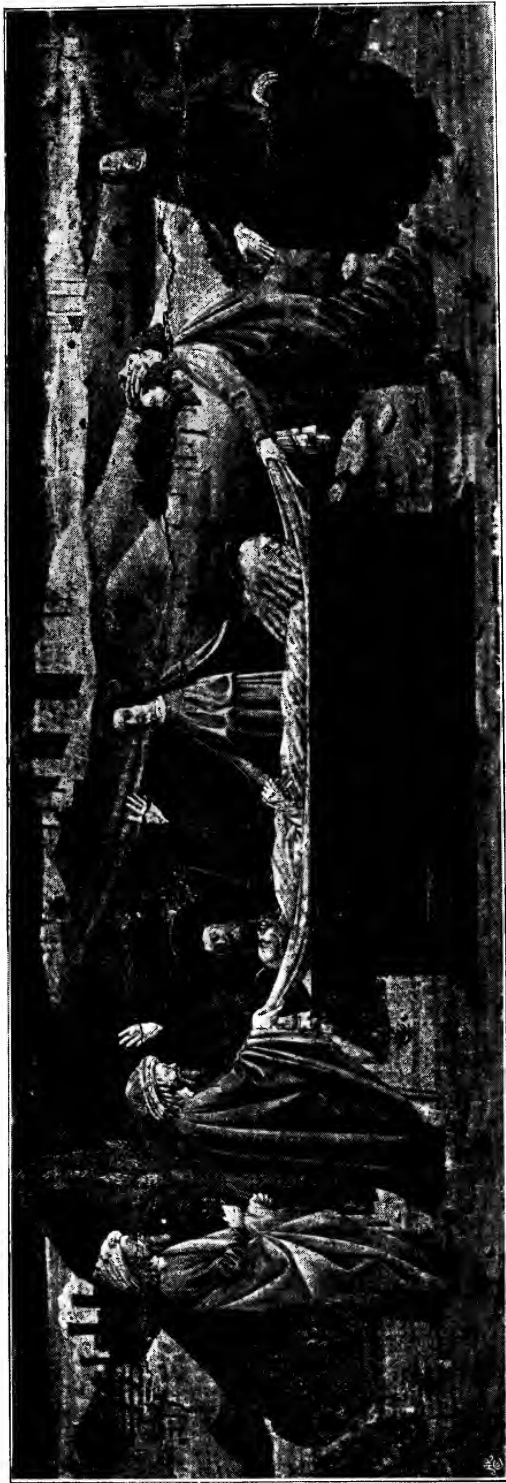
In this altar-piece the central and principal space is filled by a figure of the Virgin, who, with a golden crown on her head, and clad in a robe of dull red colour,

<sup>1</sup> Passavant alone declares it to be the work of Piero, "Raphael d'Urbino et son Père" (Paris, 1860), vol. i., p. 394.



spreads out with her hands her dark blue mantle to gather under its sheltering folds the group of suppliants kneeling below—four men on the left, and four women on the right of the picture. These figures, relatively to the figure of the Virgin, are drawn on a very small scale; but in spite of this limitation Piero has succeeded in endowing each one with vitality and dramatic action, and in varying the type in each individual case. The figure of the Virgin herself is dignified and somewhat austere. She looks down with pitying eyes upon the worshippers at her feet, in whom the stir of religious ecstasy is plainly evident, emotion being here rendered with a sincerity and verisimilitude which is often lacking in the work of earlier painters, men dominated and enfeebled by excess of the ascetic spirit. The notion of the Virgin as adored, and of the suppliants as adoring, is conceived in a nobler and more elevated vein of sentiment than the age had yet learned to appreciate.<sup>1</sup> The faces of the suppliants are well worth individual study. On the left the foremost is a young man, richly clad, who shows by the action of his hands that he is addressing himself to the Virgin; next to him comes an old man in an attitude of prayer; then a figure in the garb of the order of the Misericordia, and at the back a man whose upturned face bears an extraordinary resemblance to that of the sleeping soldier, represented full face, and fabled to be a likeness of the painter himself, in the fresco of the *Resurrection*, in the Municipio hard by. The women on the right are less remarkable. The young woman in the front is probably the wife of

<sup>1</sup> According to Rosini (*op. cit.*) these are all portraits, *vide* description of Plate XXXIX.



[*Church of the Hospital, Borgo San Sepolcro*

THE DEPOSITION OF CHRIST IN THE TOMB

*Alinari photo]*



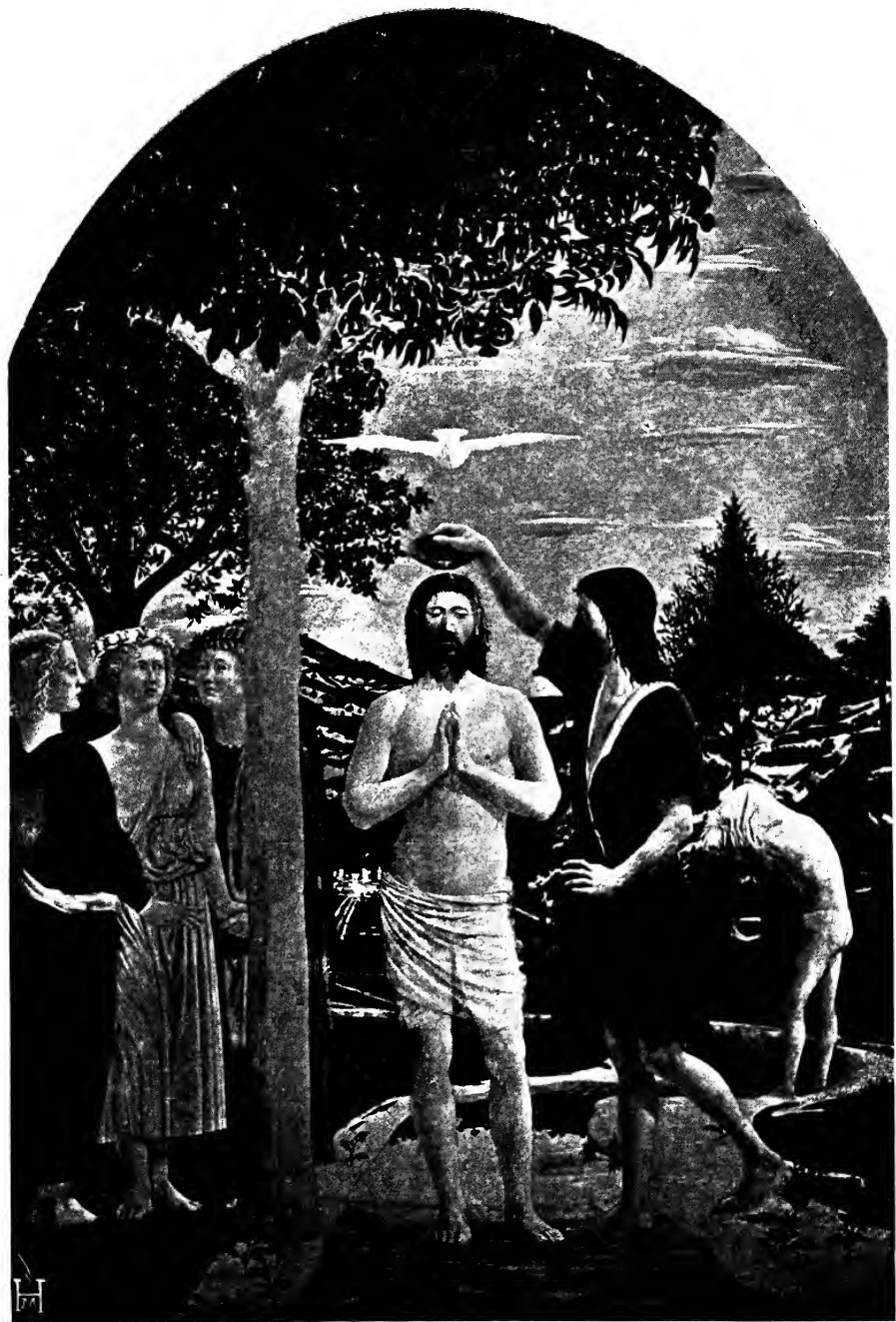
the young man nearest to her. The next two figures are wonderfully alike in feature, and the old woman at the back is most likely their mother.

In this picture Piero shows himself more possessed by the spirit of mediævalism than in any other of his works ; here if anywhere may be discerned the working of those Sienese influences to which reference has been made already, but a comparison between Piero's rendering of this subject and the rendering of Domenico di Bartolo in the infirmary at Siena will demonstrate alike the faint rudimentary impulses, common to each painter, and the enormous gulf of divergence—exhibited in their completed work—which lay open between Piero's sentiment and method and that of the Sienese masters.

Above the central subject is an upright panel of the *Crucifixion*. The Virgin and St. John stand under the cross in postures which exhibit the poignant anguish they suffer. The body of Christ is drawn simply as that of a dead man, correct in every detail. No attempt has been made to exaggerate the death convulsions according to Sienese precedent, nor to give to the corpse any sign to designate it as the recent temple of the God-head. On either side of the central panel are wings ; that on the right containing the figures of Sant' Andrea and San Bernardino, and the left one those of San Giovanni Battista and San Sebastiano. Above these side wings are two other saints and an *Annunciation*. The whole composition rests upon a predella of five scenes. In the central one is the *Entombment*, with the *Noli me tangere* and the women at the Sepulchre on the right, and on the left the *Flagellation* and Gethsemane. No other work of Piero is so archaic in conception or in treatment as

this predella. In the central panel, *The Entombment*, the figure of the Virgin with her arms uplifted is almost a replica of that in Lorenzo Lorenzetti's *Deposition* in the Accademia at Siena, while the conception of the work as a whole suggests the influence of Fra Angelico's *Entombment of the Virgin* at Cortona. Piero had scarcely begun to realize the principles of composition when he executed this important work. In the central panel the figure of the Virgin gains, no doubt, in dignity, both of exhibition and sentiment, from the juxtaposition of the kneeling figures on either side, who fill the space in that triangular scheme which Piero adopted also in the fresco of the *Resurrection*; but, with the scale of dimension differing so vastly, the picture can scarcely be discussed seriously with relation to composition at all. In the *Crucifixion*, and in the predella panels as well, the figures occupy the space without much relation the one to the other. Indeed, in *The Entombment*, the spirit is so strongly archaic as to suggest that some other painter, perhaps a pupil, may have worked at it.

*The Baptism of Christ*, now in the National Gallery, was formerly in the church of the Priors of St. John the Baptist at Borgo San Sepolcro, but on the suppression of this establishment in 1785 it was given over to the chapter of the cathedral, who sold it on the pretext of using the proceeds for the repair of their church. The *Baptism* formed the centre and principal portion of the picture. Two wings, the work of some other hand, probably Domenico di Bartolo, were formerly attached to it, and these are now to be found in the church of San Giovanni at Borgo San Sepolcro. There are traditions also of a predella, upon which were represented divers scenes in



*Hanfstängl photo*

*[National Gallery, London]*

## THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST



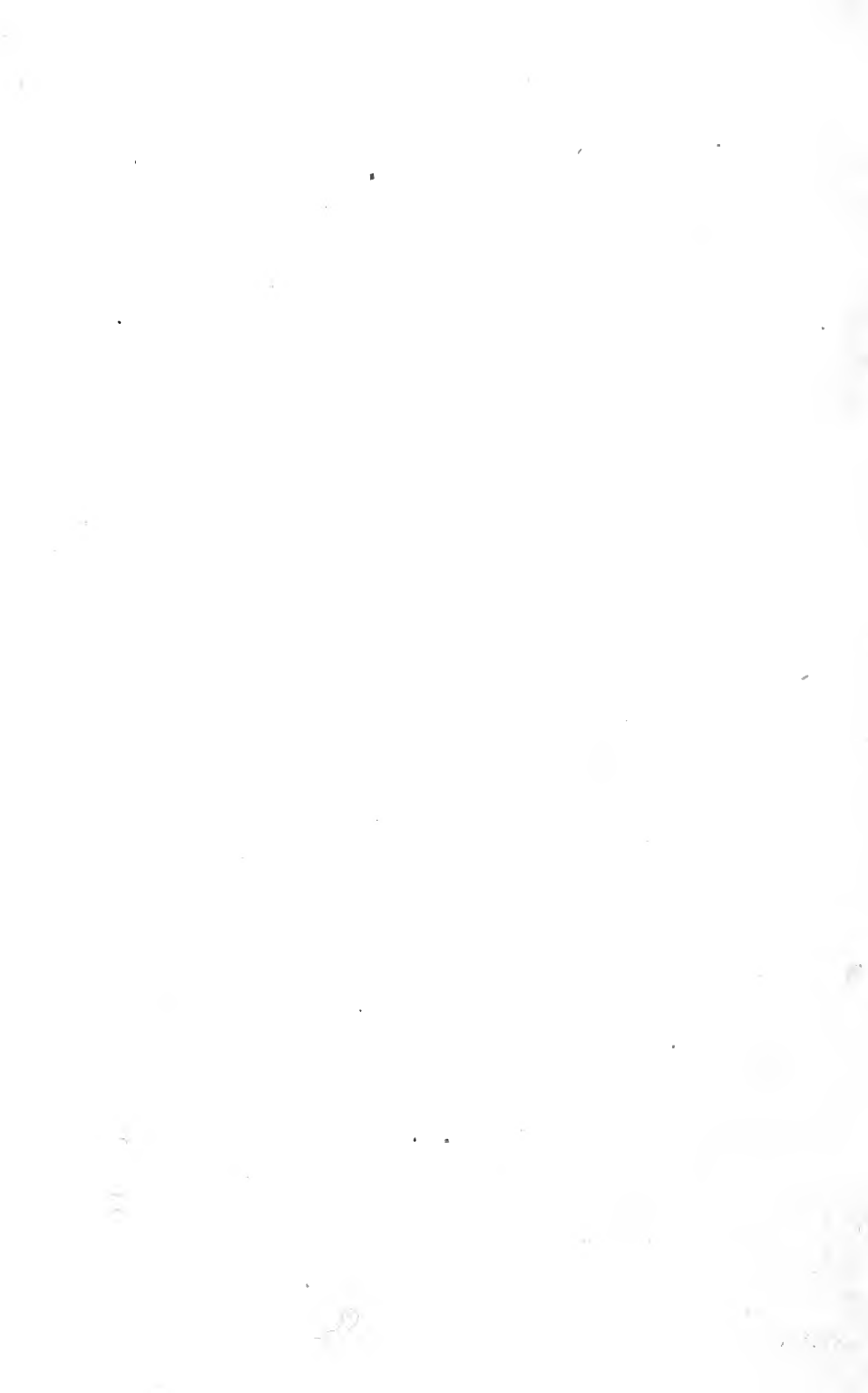


*Alinari photo]*

*[Municipio, Borgo San Sepolcro*

SAN LUDOVICO





the life of the Baptist, but these small subjects have disappeared, and there seems to be no record of the fate which has overtaken them.

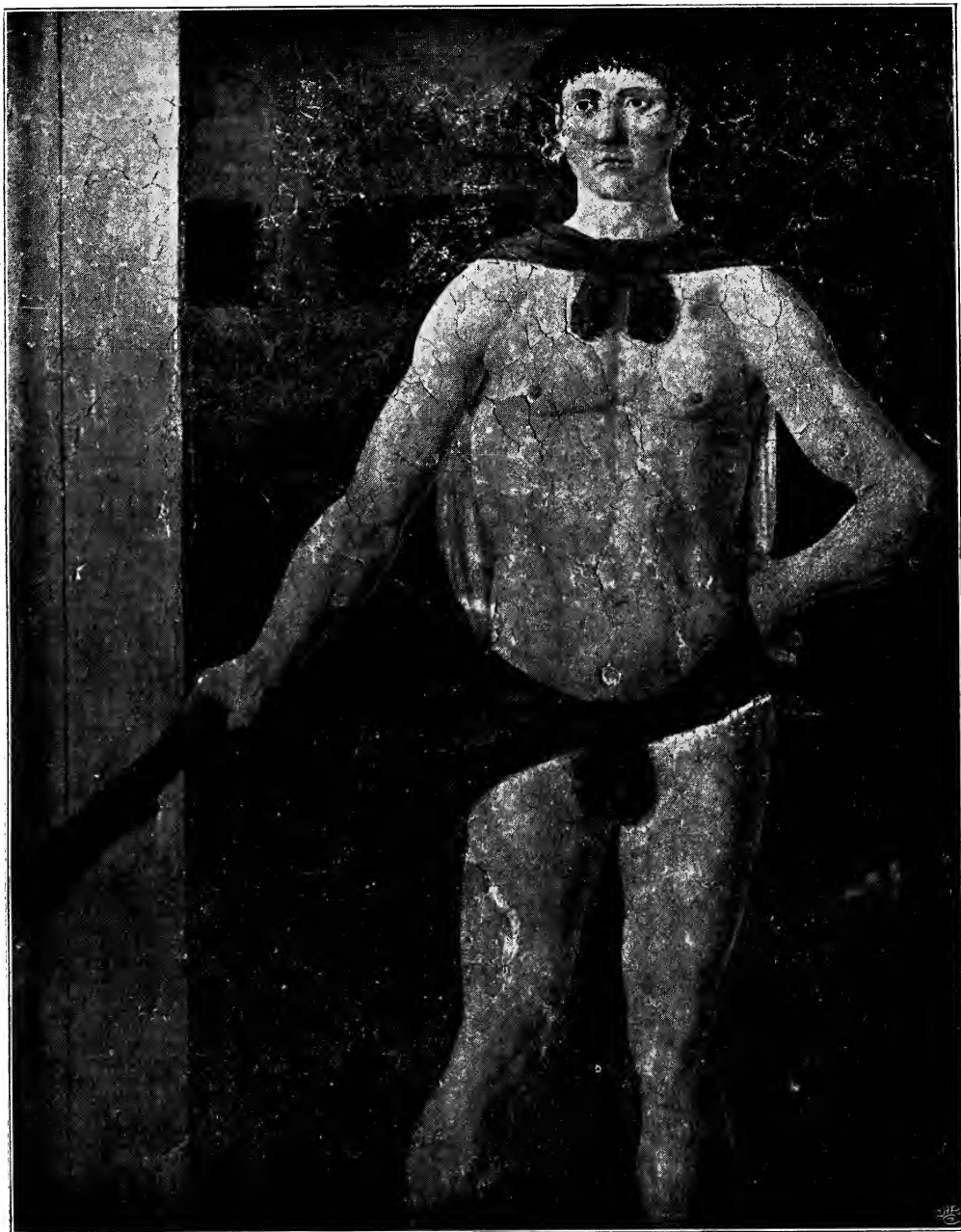
Certain Oriental characteristics—*e.g.*, the costume of the figures in the background—suggest that the date of this altar-piece must be near that of the *Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* fresco at Arezzo, and there is, moreover, a likeness between the angels and the female figures who attend the Empress Helena. The landscape is in Piero's ordinary style, and somewhat more carefully handled than usual; special attention has been devoted to the painting of the foliage of the tree under which Christ stands, and the plants in the foreground are drawn with the utmost precision. Piero has here undoubtedly failed in the drawing of the extremities of his figures, the legs of Christ being thick and clumsy, and those of the Baptist loosely and incorrectly drawn—a curious lapse in a picture where minor accessories such as the dove and the shell from which St. John pours the water over Christ's head are most carefully rendered. The group of angels on the left rank amongst Piero's most gracious and dignified figures, and throughout the picture the masses of light and shade are managed with the utmost skill.

In the Palazzo Comunale at Borgo San Sepolcro is another fragment reasonably ascribed to Piero, the half-length figure of *San Ludovico*. The saint is portrayed in episcopal garb, with a staff in one hand and a book in the other. The youthful face and the slim delicate hands are drawn with unusual smoothness, and the whole figure is finely modelled, but in its present state of ruin it is difficult to discuss its merits. It bears the

following inscription and date: "Tempore nobilis et generosi viri Ludovico Acciaiolì pro magnifico et excelso populo florentino rectoris ac primi vexilliferi justitiæ populi ære Burgiano MCCCCLX."

In the Casa Graziani, a house which now belongs to the Cavaliere Giovanni Battista Collacchioni, there was formerly a figure of Hercules painted in fresco, an undoubted work of Piero. This had been injured in the lower parts by the opening of a new doorway, but the head and body were in a fairly good state of preservation, and the Cavaliere Collacchioni has caused it to be transferred to canvas and has hung it in his residence, the Villa Cattani. This fresco was evidently painted when Piero was at the zenith of his powers. The drawing of the figure is a fine study of anatomy, and the colouring of the lion's skin and of the tapestry hangings at the back is rich and skilfully combined. The figure naturally invites comparison with that of the young man in the *Death of Adam* at Arezzo, and probably belongs to the same period.

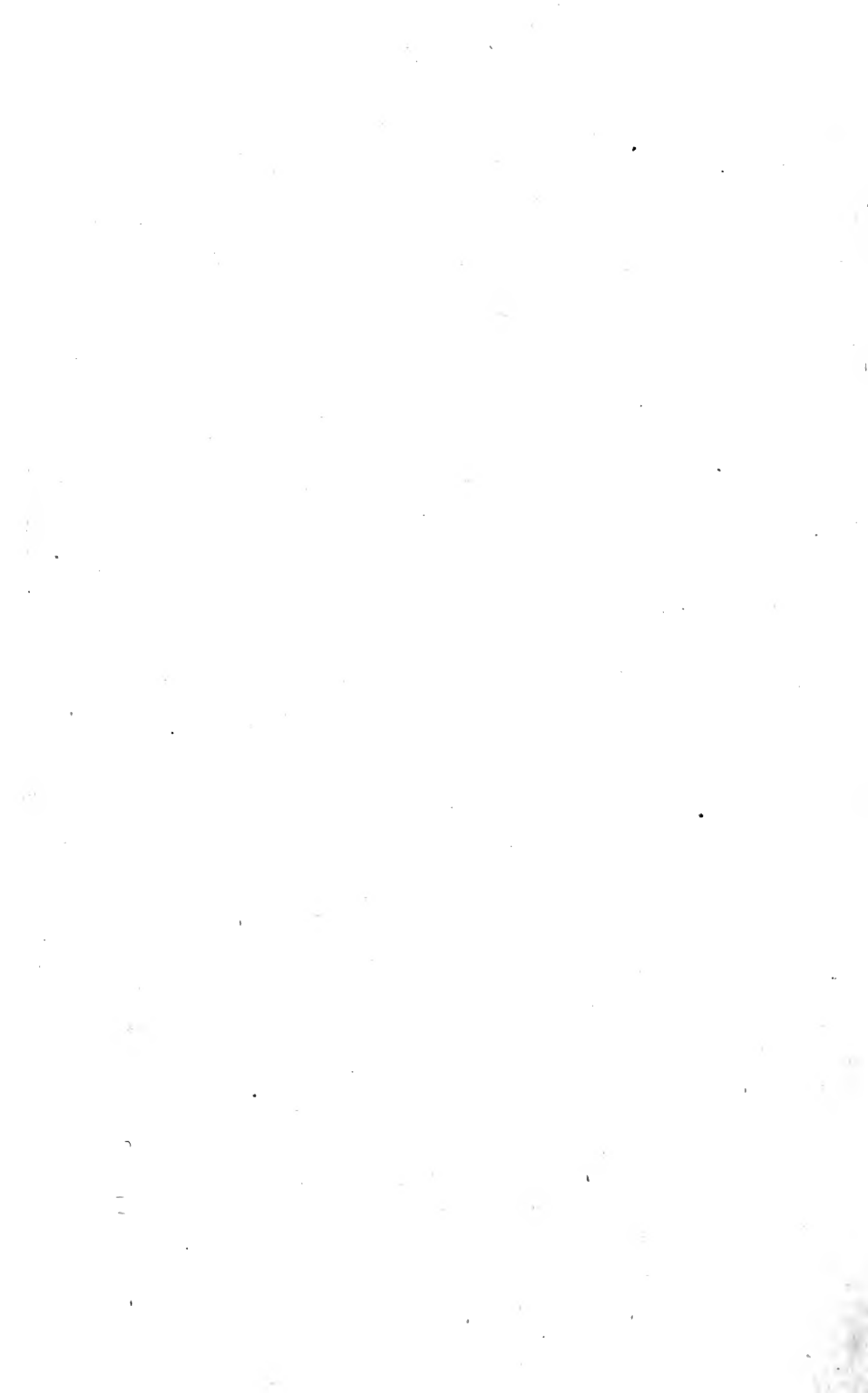
It has been noted that on November 4th, 1468, Piero gave a receipt to the chamberlain of the Order of the Annunziata for the balance of the sum due to him in respect of the banner which he had painted for the order aforesaid, the receipt in question having been dated from the little town of Bastia, near Borgo San Sepolcro, where he was at that time staying. A short distance beyond Bastia is Monterchio, a small village, and there, in the chapel of the cemetery, is a fresco which, after passing for generations unnoticed, was identified in 1889 by the Cavaliere Vincenzo Funghini of Arezzo as an undoubted work of Piero della Francesca. It bears neither



*Alinari photo*]

*[Villa Cattani, Borgo San Sepolcro*

HERCULES



date nor signature, but the fact that Piero was living in the neighbourhood in 1468 justifies the inference that it was executed somewhere about this time.

The wall on which it is painted is slightly concave. The subject of the fresco is the standing figure of the Virgin of the size of life. Two angels, standing one on either side of her, hold back falling curtains of rich material, and thus seem to exhibit the Virgin to the worshippers in the chapel. The face is sad and wistful, and the stately and imposing figure recalls strongly the presentment of the Magdalen in the cathedral of Arezzo. The impression of languor and sorrow which the first glance at the figure produces, arises naturally from the signs of impending maternity which are rendered with verisimilitude sufficient to have won for the Virgin, in the mouths of the adjacent countrywomen, the name of *La Madonna del Parto*. There are in this fresco signs of haste and carelessness most unusual in Piero's work ; but certain of these imperfections, notably the bad drawing of the Virgin's hands and the clumsy folds of her robe, may well be laid to the charge of some unskilful restorer ; for that the fresco has been partially repainted is almost certain, from the use of a peculiar shade of blue in the Virgin's robe—a shade which is completely foreign to Piero's palette. On the other hand, the raiment of the angels is painted with all the care and delicacy which he loved to spend over drapery, the folds being disposed with the utmost grace, and perfectly shaded. One of the angels is clad in green and the other in deep red ; and these angels, it may be remarked, exhibit, when taken together, a feature entirely absent in all other productions of Piero's brush, namely, that one is an exact

repetition of the other. Except that one faces right and the other left they are exactly alike. He might have cut one out of cardboard, traced it on one side of the fresco, and then have reversed it and traced it on the other side. This is the one instance in which Piero seems to have shirked trouble and striven for cheap effect.

According to Vasari Piero painted in various places many frescoes of which every trace has disappeared. In Ferrara he decorated the chapel of Sant' Agostino, but the paintings there were already greatly injured by damp in Vasari's time, and the chapel itself has long been swept away. In Milan over the door of San Sepolcro he painted a Pietà (it still exists, and is ascribed to Bartolommeo Suardi, detto il Bramantino), which Vasari describes as a marvel of foreshortening. Also in the palace of the Marchese Ostanesia he is said to have painted divers chambers and porticoes, and also to have decorated some stables outside the Porta Vercellina with figures of men and horses.<sup>1</sup> Another vanished work was the fresco which Piero painted for the Brotherhood of the Misericordia at Borgo San Sepolcro. This was probably painted on an outside wall between the chapel and the hospital itself, and it is of this work, in fresco, that Vasari speaks, and not of the existing altar-piece. A separate contract, dated 1478, exists in the Archivio at Florence, by the terms of which Piero was to receive eighty-seven *scudi* for his work.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, vol. ii., p. 492.

<sup>2</sup> Corazzini, "Appunti Storici e filologici," p. 62, "una figura dipinta infra la chiesa nostra e lo spedale in muro che è verso il muro della terra, verso il poggio." *Vide ante*, p. 43.



*Alinari photo*

*[Cemetery Chapel, Monterchio]*

## THE MADONNA DEL PARTO AND TWO ANGELS





Vasari mentions several more of Piero's works in the neighbourhood of Arezzo ; one a seated figure of San Domenico with attendant angels in Santa Maria delle Grazie, and a San Vincenzo in San Bernardo, a church of the monks of Monte Oliveto. At Sargiano, a house belonging to the Frate Zoccolanti of San Francesco, he painted a figure of Christ praying in the garden, which Vasari describes as "bellissimo." In the cathedral of San Ciriaco at Ancona he painted a fine picture of the marriage of the Virgin over the altar of San Giuseppe. Vasari closes his narrative with the interesting statement that amongst the pupils of Piero was Piero da Castel della Pieve, that is to say Perugino, though in another place he describes him as a pupil of Verrocchio ; but, as Passavant<sup>1</sup> points out, Perugino might well have been Piero's pupil in perspective.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. i., p. 443.

## CHAPTER VI

### VARIOUS WORKS

TO revert to the other surviving pictures which are commonly ascribed to Piero without demur, the most famous yet unnoticed is the altar-piece painted for the monastery of Sant' Antonio at Perugia, and now in the Pinacoteca in that city. This work, one of his most fascinating compositions, is manifestly an early one, and probably executed soon after the *Misericordia* altar-piece at Borgo San Sepolcro. It consists of three compartments, the whole composition being framed in a delicate Gothic design of richly worked pillars and arches. The central space is occupied by the Virgin, who is heavily robed in red brocade and a blue mantle, and bears in face a strong resemblance to the *Madonna del Parto* at Monterchio. On her lap sits the infant Christ with a fat clumsy figure, thick shapeless legs and thighs, and a face illumined by a look of significant and preternatural gravity. He is raising his hand in the act of benediction, and though the group is treated in a conventional spirit, it is as a whole stately and full of grace. With the exquisite ornamentation of the golden background, and the harmonious architectural design of the throne, it forms in itself a beautiful picture. On the right are the figures of San Francesco and Sant' Elisabetta, and on the left those of Sant' Antonio and San Giovanni Battista, all

the figures being finely conceived and painted with great power of characterization. The St. John the Baptist is unmistakably taken from the same model who sat for the Christ of the *Resurrection* at Borgo San Sepolcro, but here the face is that of a mere mortal and lacks entirely the look of awesome reminiscence of the nether world which yet lingers on the features of the risen Christ.

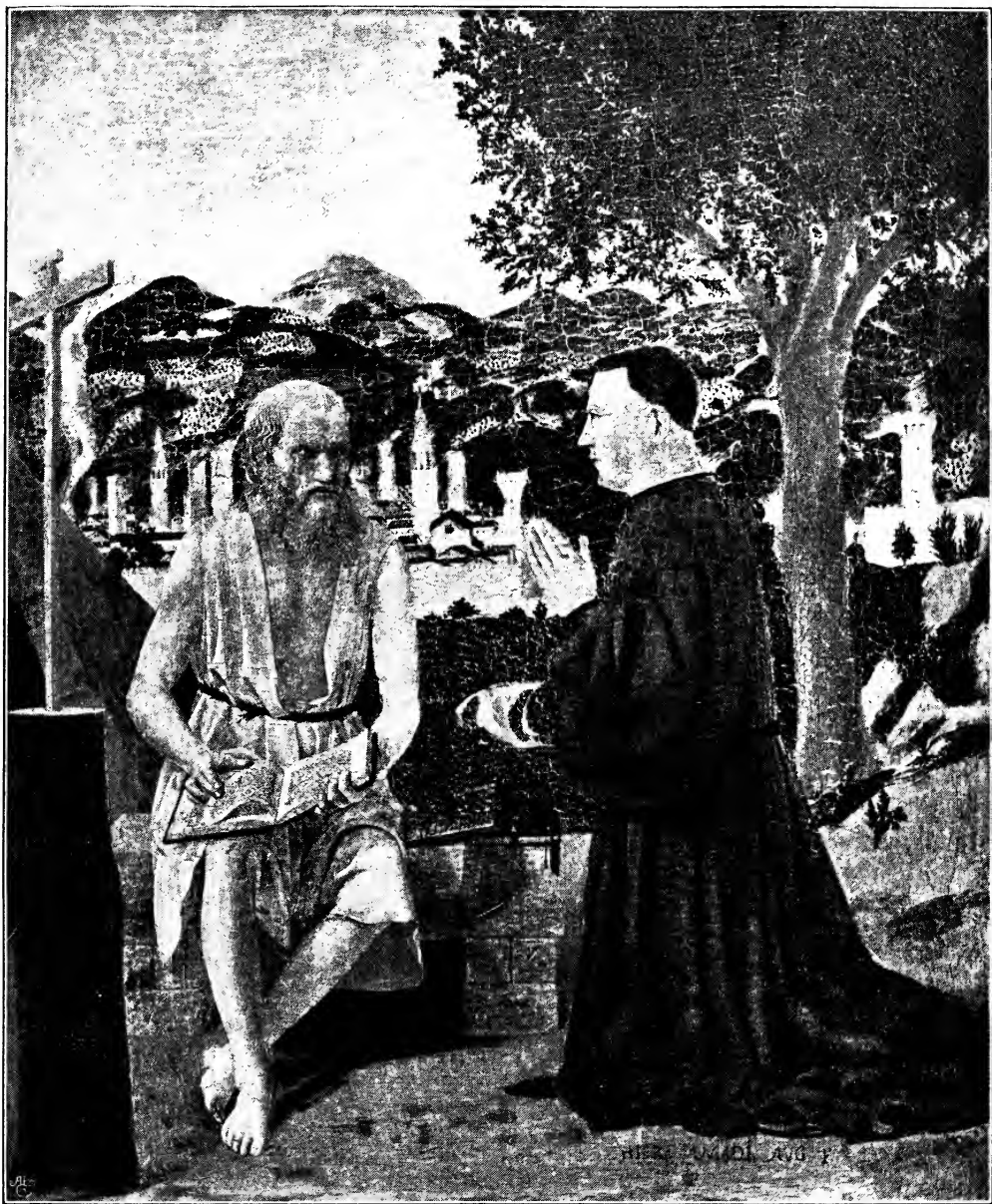
There is no positive evidence to show the date of this work, but a cursory examination will show that it marks a great advance both in conception and execution on the altar-piece of the *Misericordia*. It is difficult to estimate a painter's progress in composition from a collection of isolated figures such as this altar-piece, but in its execution Piero has shown a dexterity as a painter of light and shade which helps to explain his triumphant success in the *Vision of Constantine*. The body of the child is illuminated with strength exactly sufficient to let the rest of the composition appear a perfectly harmonious study of chiaroscuro. The technique of the individual figures shows a great advance upon his earlier work, the lines being more flowing and gracious, and the facial expression softer and more natural.

Above this altar-piece is placed a separate picture of the *Annunciation*, one of Piero's most wonderful feats in architectural design. The spectator has before him a graceful screen of classic form, built up of semicircular arches and slender Corinthian columns, in front of which on the left kneels the angel, fair and robust, with a head crowned by a mass of that rich, curling hair which Piero loved to paint. On the right the Virgin is standing, dressed according to the painter's habitual rendering, in

thick flowing robes, very heavy in texture. Between the two figures the eye penetrates to the end of a long cloistered passage of the most exquisite design, pillar receding behind pillar, and arch behind arch, drawn with marvellous skill and exactitude of detail. No other picture of Piero's reveals so clearly as this his complete mastery of the art of perspective; and at the same time it never suggests—consummate technical achievement as it is—that the artist, when he drew it, was seeking to make a special demonstration of his powers. The figures, the architectural setting, the bit of garden landscape behind, are in perfect relation, every accessory falls into its proper place, and helps to exhibit the whole as a triumph of learned composition.

But the most marked element of success in this charming work is undoubtedly the exquisite framework of architecture in which it is set. In the fresco at Rimini Piero introduces architecture as a subordinate detail; in the *Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* at Arezzo, and in the *Flagellation* at Urbino, he uses it with greater elaboration and effect, but here he reaches his highest point of excellence. Here he exhibits the fairest presentments of the human figure, combined in perfect harmony with the fairest conceptions of the architect and master of perspective—an indication perhaps that his artistic nature was dominated by the fascination of science powerfully enough to let him find a completer and more congenial outlet for his energies in dealing with subjects in which the measured and orderly beauty of architecture would have its part.

It is quite certain that this picture is much later in date than the altar-piece over which it now stands, and

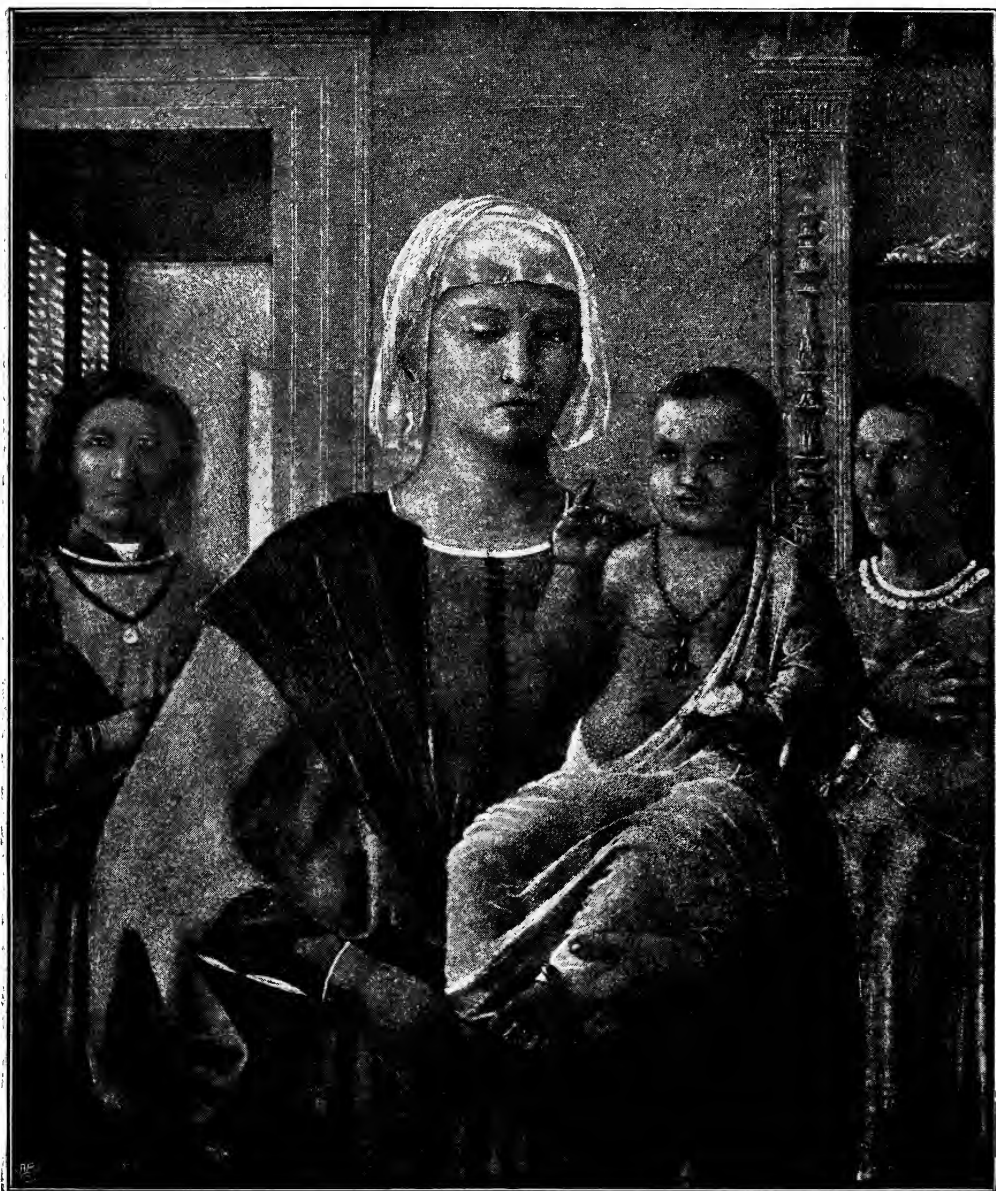


*Alinari photo*

*[Accademia, Venice]*

ST. JEROME WITH KNEELING FIGURE





*Brogi photo]*

*[Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie fuori Città, Sinigaglia*

THE MADONNA AND CHILD WITH TWO ANGELS





the combination, as we see it, is not a very fortunate one ; but the two works were in the same juxtaposition when Vasari saw them in the church of the convent of Sant' Antonio.

The Accademia at Venice possesses one of Piero's works, a seated figure of *St. Jerome*, before whom kneels a man in a monastic robe with hands folded as if in supplication. There is a tradition that the kneeling figure is Girolamo, the son of Carlo Malatesta of Sogliano, who in 1464 married a daughter of Federigo of Urbino.<sup>1</sup> The landscape in the background represents a hilly region, like the country portrayed in the *Resurrection* at Borgo San Sepolcro, and in the plain stands a little town with a perfect forest of bell towers. The rough facial drawing and a certain crudeness both in colour and in composition denote that this picture was an early work. It is signed "PETRI DE BŪGO SCĪ SEPULCRI OPUS."

The painting of the *Virgin and Child* between two saints in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie outside Sinigaglia was at one time placed amongst Piero's doubtful works ; but, in these more severely critical days, expert opinion has turned—and with good reason—in favour of its authenticity. The handling is entirely in his manner, and the Virgin is of the same type as the seated figure in the altar-piece at Perugia and the *Madonna del Parto*. The composition and the pose of

<sup>1</sup> The picture bears the inscription "Hier. Amadi Aug. F.," probably the name of some owner to whom the picture subsequently passed. Cavalcaselle e Crowe (vols. iv. and viii., pp. 316, 239) mention a certain Francesco Amadi, who, in 1408, gave a commission for a Madonna's head to one Niccolo in Venice,

the figures is somewhat awkward, and the picture altogether is one of the least attractive of his works.

*The Nativity*, now in the National Gallery, must have been painted some time after the *Baptism of Christ*, near which it now hangs. It has suffered much from the fading of colour, but more from repainting. The landscape background is the conventional one Piero uses so frequently, and the animals are as archaic as Paolo Uccello's horses. The chief beauty of the composition lies in the figure of the Virgin and in the heads of the singing angels, which are full of dignity and dramatic power; and the attitudes, especially that of the left-hand angel, are graceful and dignified. The figures of the Virgin and Child are of the gentlest and fairest type, and show undoubted signs of the Flemish influence which made itself felt in Florence and throughout Central Italy after Hugo van der Goes set up his great altar-piece in the Ospedale of Santa Maria Novella.

The contrast between the slim, delicate infant, which here lies on the ground before the adoring Virgin, and the plump and somewhat clumsy one in the altar-piece at Perugia, is quite strong enough to justify the inference that here Piero must have been swayed by some influence from without, and it is unnecessary to seek for a more probable source of such influence than Hugo's great composition. In the drawing of the ruined shed under which the Holy Family takes shelter, Piero has given striking proof of his skill in aerial perspective. The jutting roof comes forward from the wall, the receding planes being rendered with perfect accuracy; but he fails completely in dealing with the background of hills in the landscape, which form a flat, unrelieved



*Hanfstängl photo]*

*[National Gallery, London*

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD



mass in themselves, and seem to occupy the same plane as the shed in the foreground. This picture formerly belonged to the Franceschi-Marini family of Borgo San Sepolcro, from whom it passed to the Cavaliere Baldi of Florence. Mr. Alexander Barker next purchased it, and at his sale in 1874 it was acquired by the National Gallery.

The figure of *St. Michael*, also in the National Gallery, is a thoroughly typical work, and has the strongest claims to be considered genuine, though it has failed to satisfy certain of the experts. The painting of the head and face is in Piero's best manner, and the whole figure is full of dignity, resembling strongly both in pose and features the central angel of the group in the *Baptism* hanging close to it. The dado of inlaid marble behind the saint is a close imitation of the tomb in the *Resurrection* at Borgo San Sepolcro. In the Gallery at Urbino is an *Architectural subject*, and at Berlin is another of the same character, both of which may undoubtedly be ascribed to Piero's hand.

The other paintings which Piero executed at Urbino will be described later on; and, besides these, there are one or two other extant pictures which can be classed, at least in part, as Piero's undoubted work—examples in which his special characteristics are strongly marked, though certain portions of them may suggest the hand of the pupil or the assistant. The most celebrated of these is a fine picture in the Brera at Milan (No. 187), which was at one time assigned to him without reserve, and though recent criticism gives a certain share of it to Corradino of Urbino (Fra Carnovale),<sup>1</sup> there is little

<sup>1</sup> It is assigned to him in the catalogue of the Brera.

doubt that those points in it, which assert their excellence even to an untutored eye, are the work of Piero. Its execution may be referred to the period of Piero's sojourn in Urbino, as it formerly hung in the church of San Bernardino outside the city. It is a very interesting composition. The angels who stand behind the Virgin are strongly suggestive of Piero's style, both in drawing and in handling of colour. In the foreground kneels Duke Federigo, clad in black armour. The Virgin herself—in face not unlike the Virgin in the picture in Christ Church, Oxford—is said to be a portrait of the Duchess Battista,<sup>1</sup> and the child asleep on her lap to have been taken from the infant Guidobaldo. In grouping and colour the picture recalls Piero's manner very strongly, and it is not unlikely that Corradino may have begun the work under Piero's direction during the sojourn of the master in Urbino. Piero almost certainly had a hand in the Virgin and child and in the heads of the angels, and the architectural background is entirely in his manner, but the group of male figures standing behind Duke Federigo—and especially that of the butcher-like figure supposed to represent St. Francis—suggest the work of another hand. St. John the Baptist has the face of Christ in the *Resurrection* at Borgo and in the *Baptism* in the National Gallery, and of the Baptist in the Perugia altar-piece, but the type here is smoother and more elaborately painted, and consequently deficient in the rugged virility which characterizes the other renderings.

*The Virgin and Child with Angels* in the Library at

<sup>1</sup> Pungileoni, *op. cit.*, p. 53, assumes the altar-piece to have been painted in 1472, the year the duchess died.



*Private photo*

*{Christ Church, Oxford*

THE MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ANGELS





Christ Church, Oxford, reflects, in as remarkable a degree as does *The Nativity* in the National Gallery, the influence of the great Flemish triptych by Hugo van der Goes in the Ospedale of Santa Maria Novella, and likewise shows how powerfully Piero's style and method of composition was affected by the coloured reliefs of the Della Robbias. The general arrangement, the pose of the figures—especially of the angels—and the background of blue sky, all recall one of Luca's delicate masterpieces. To deal with the figure of the Virgin in particular, the slender neck, the long thin nose, and the narrow face are distinctly suggestive of the ascetic-looking women in Hugo's picture ; but Piero showed too real a sense of beauty to copy slavishly the hydrocephalous type which Hugo has repeated in every woman and angel in his wonderful work.

In spite of the evident Flemish influence in this picture, the types—although showing an undoubted variation—are all marked with Piero's characteristics. The type of the Virgin is that (somewhat refined) of the Brera picture just described, and of the *Nativity* in the National Gallery. The faces of the angels are skilfully drawn and modelled, the colouring is deep and warm in tone and finely glazed. The painting of the brocaded raiment of the Virgin and the angels bears a certain resemblance to that of the Virgin's robe in Domenico Veneziano's great picture in the National Gallery, but it is more like that in the profile portrait (No. 585) formerly entitled *Isotta da Rimini*, and ascribed to Piero, and is probably the work of the same hand. With this exception the rest of the picture is almost certainly from Piero's brush.

The *Profile portrait of a woman* in the National Gallery recently alluded to (No. 585) is no longer ascribed to Piero, and its claim to represent *Isotta da Rimini* is also abandoned, seeing that a comparison of the features thereof with authentic coins and medallions has demonstrated the fact that it bears not the least resemblance to Malatesta's mistress. The face has been heavily repainted, but the treatment of the richly-brocaded dress suggests that it may be from the hand of some other pupil of Domenico Veneziano. The same remarks will apply to another profile portrait in the National Gallery (No. 758), at one time supposed to represent the Contessa Palma of Urbino.

In the various galleries of Europe are several other *Female heads in profile* which have been set down as Piero's work. One of these is in the gallery at Berlin (it formerly belonged to the Earl of Ashburnham, and was exhibited at the New Gallery in 1893), and another is in the Poldi-Pezzoli Museum at Milan, these two being portraits of the same lady taken at different times. Both of them are clad in the rich brocade which Domenico and his pupils painted with such gusto. The portrait at Milan is an exquisite work. In conception and in execution as well it reaches a point of excellence paralleled by scarcely any other work of its period. There is no extant evidence which connects its authorship with Piero; but if it is not from his hand it must be the work of some gifted painter of the same school whose name has perished. There is another of the same type in the Uffizi, and Mr. Drury Lowe has in his collection the portrait of a *Young Man* which Cavalcaselle and Crowe assign—with reservation—to Piero.



*Hanfstängl photo*

*[National Gallery, London]*

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Attributed by some critics to Piero della Francesca





*Hanfstängl photo]*

*[National Gallery, London*

PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Attributed by some critics to Piero della Francesca



Mr. C. Newton Robinson possesses a *Madonna and Child* ascribed to Piero, which has many of the painter's early characteristics. It is painted somewhat more heavily than is Piero's wont, and the red of the Virgin's robe is more vivid than any red used in any one of his recognized works, but the embroidery of the dark green robe is exactly in his style. The figure of the child is ungraceful, with fat shapeless legs like those of the infant Christ in the Perugia altar-piece; the face is charmingly drawn, as is also the right hand of the Virgin. There are faint traces of trees and of a landscape in the background.

There are three pictures in the private apartments of Prince Barberini in his palace at Rome which were at one time assigned to Piero, and reputed to have been painted by him during his sojourn at Urbino. At the devolution of the duchy to the Papacy they came into the possession of Urban VIII., and have descended to the representative of his family. The first in importance is a *Portrait of Federigo and his son Guidobaldo*, which is said to have been painted in 1478. Federigo is drawn full life-size, clad in armour, and wearing the insignia of the Garter and of the *Ermellino* as well, and Guidobaldo is represented as a boy of five or six years of age. The other two pictures are *Architectural subjects* drawn in Piero's manner, with figures introduced. Dennistoun attributes these works to Mantegna—an ascription which would hardly be advanced at the present time.

It has been already noted that Vasari, in the beginning of his life of Piero, states that he was at one time employed by "Guidobaldo Feltre the elder" at Urbino. Milanesi, in his notes to Vasari's life, remarks that the



prince here designated could not possibly have been Guidobaldo, the son of the great Federigo, seeing that Guidobaldo was only born in 1472, and became duke ten years later; but it is possible that, by employment, Vasari may have had in his mind patronage, and that Piero regarded Guidobaldo as a patron is evident from his dedication to the young duke, some time after 1482, of his "*Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus*," a dedication in which he speaks of his great age and failing powers. But the most eventful visit Piero paid to Urbino was one he made in Duke Federigo's time, when he painted the well-known *Portraits of the duke and of the Duchess Battista*. With his inveterate inaccuracy Vasari may perhaps have had this visit in view, but there is a farther possibility that he may have been thinking of another alleged visit, a contingency which may be considered later on.

The Counts of Urbino date from the close of the thirteenth century, and amongst their number was that Count Guido who was stamped by Dante as the exemplar of treacherous counsel.<sup>1</sup> In 1404 the sovereignty passed to Count Guid' Antonio, who seems to have exercised a certain amount of jurisdiction over Borgo San Sepolcro. This ruler died in 1443, and was succeeded by his son Od' Antonio, whose short reign was ended by assassination. He lived long enough, however, to obtain the title of duke from Pope Eugenius IV., and on his death in 1444 Federigo, the natural son of Guid' Antonio, became Duke.

The long reign of Count Guid' Antonio had been a

<sup>1</sup> "*Inferno*," xxvii.

prosperous one for Urbino. He was a wise and enlightened prince, and one filled with the current enthusiasm for art. During his reign Domenico Veneziano was at work decorating with frescoes the Baglioni Palace at Perugia; and, as Domenico was one of the leading painters of his time, the report of his presence would naturally arouse the interest of a prince of Guid' Antonio's temper. From one source or another a tradition has arisen that Guid' Antonio used his influence to induce Domenico to accept as a pupil a talented young man, Piero della Francesca, a native of the neighbouring town of Borgo San Sepolcro. Perhaps this legend, coming to Vasari's ears, may have been the source of his statement concerning Piero's presence in Urbino, the name Guidobaldo therein being written in lieu of Guid' Antonio.

These details must necessarily remain conjectural, but thirty years later, when Piero was a painter of established fame, we are able to find firmer ground. Pungileoni<sup>1</sup> records Piero's presence at Urbino in 1469 as the guest of Giovanni Santi. At this date Federigo's court must have been at the apex of its splendour, the haunt of learned men and artists from all parts of Italy. Castiglione in "The Courtyer" remarks how at different times "Leonard Vincio, Mantegna, Raphael, Michel Angelo, and George de Castelfranco" (Giorgione) were guests of the Dukes Federigo and Guidobaldo, but he makes no mention of Piero. Earlier than these came Giuliano da Rimini, who painted a crucifixion in the church of San Giovanni at Urbania or Castel Durante in 1407.

<sup>1</sup> "Elogio Storico di Giovanni Santi," p. 12 (Urbino, 1822).

Federigo summoned to Urbino Justus of Ghent, because, as we learn from Bisticci's life, he wished to have at his court someone skilled in the use of oil colour, and this Flemish artist painted for the church of Sant' Agata *The Institution of the Last Supper*,<sup>1</sup> a work which includes an excellent portrait of Federigo, as well as one of an Oriental who is supposed to be the ambassador of Usum Hassan, king of Persia.<sup>2</sup> And in the Oratorio di San Giovanni Battista is a wonderful series of Giottesque frescoes representing the Crucifixion, the baptism of Christ, and scenes in the life of the Baptist by an unknown hand.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is now in the public gallery.

<sup>2</sup> Lazzari, "Compendio Storico delle Chiese" (Urbino, 1801).

<sup>3</sup> It was attributed in the time of Giovanni Santi to Lorenzo and Jacopo di San Severino (*Pungileoni, op. cit.*, p. 4).

## CHAPTER VII

### URBINO

ACCORDING to Pungileoni the art world of Urbino was somewhat aggrieved and jealous of Federigo's introduction of Justus of Ghent into the city ; wherefore, on account of an agitation in favour of Italian artists, Piero della Francesca and Paolo Uccello were invited also. The Brotherhood of Christ's Body made overtures to Piero for an ancona in their chapel, but for some unknown reason he refused to paint it.<sup>1</sup> Paolo Uccello's only remaining work in Urbino, *The Robbery of the Pyx*, forms the predella of Justus of Ghent's picture of *The Institution of the Sacrament*, now in the Public Gallery. In his rhymed chronicle of Urbino, Giovanni Santi shows a strong bias against Justus, though he praises freely the Flemings, Hugo van der Goes and Van Eyck.

Giovanni Santi,<sup>2</sup> at this time the leading painter of Urbino, was no doubt a *persona grata* with Duke Federigo. Piero della Francesca had already gained a

<sup>1</sup> Pungileoni, *op. cit.*, p. 13, declares, on the authority of the records of the Brotherhood, that Piero's charges for travel and entertainment were borne by Giovanni Santi.

<sup>2</sup> Santi in his rhymed chronicle makes mention of Piero :

“Masaccio e l'Andrein, Paolo Occelli  
Antonio e Pier si gran disegnatori  
Piero del Borgo antico più di quelli.”

wide reputation in Central Italy, so it was not strange that he should be bidden to Urbino, or that Santi should give him hospitality. It is probable that he was specially invited to paint the *Portraits of Federigo and his duchess*, for portrait painters were few in Central Italy at this period, and the fame of Piero's portrait of Malatesta at Rimini would certainly have come to Federigo's knowledge. Federigo was painted many times, and several of his effigies survive, but none equals this one painted by Piero.

The head and shoulder portraits of Federigo and Battista are painted on adjacent panels, which open on hinges, and disclose inside two allegorical pictures, *trionfi*, in which the duke and duchess play the leading parts. The heads are drawn in profile about life size. Federigo's expression is one of shrewd benevolence, and the duchess resembles a Swiss or German peasant rather than an Italian princess. The subjects inside the panels are careful and elaborate studies of composition. "On a car drawn by two white horses Federigo sits in a chair of antique model. He is in full armour, with his helmet on his knee and his truncheon in his hand, and a figure of Victory stands behind him and sets a garland on his head. On the front part of the car are four female figures. One with a broken column in her arms represents Force ; another, emblematic of Prudence, is placed in the centre of the group holding a mirror in her hand ; her face, bright with youthful hope, looks in advance to the future, and the profile or mask of a bearded and wrinkled old man, affixed to the back of her Janus head, contemplates the past with matured experience, a metaphor closely followed by Raphael for his *Juris-*



*Brogi photo*]

[*Uffizi Gallery, Florence*

THE DUKE OF URBINO





*Brogi photo*]

[*Uffizi Gallery, Florence*

THE DUCHESS OF URBINO





*prudence* in the Stanza della Segnatura. Justice is introduced with her scales and a two-edged sword, and the fourth figure is scarcely to be distinguished. The distant country in this, as in others of these pictures, shows that their author was unable to apply to landscape the excellence of linear perspective displayed by his architectural designs. Duchess Battista's triumph is similarly treated, but her car is drawn by bay unicorns, types of purity, and she sits in a chair of state, splendidly attired, with an open book on her knee. Behind her a bright maiden, meant probably for Truth, contrasts with an elderly female in semi-monastic dress. On the front of the car Faith, with cross and chalice, sits by Religion, on whose knee the pelican feeds her young, emblematic of the Saviour's love for mankind."<sup>1</sup>

All who know the treasures of the Uffizi will remember these portraits. They hung in the palace at Urbino as long as there were dukes to rule the state, but when, in 1624, the last of the Della Roveres—descendant of the Francesco Maria whom the childless Guidobaldo adopted—resigned his duchy to Pope Urban VIII., Piero's portraits of Federigo and his wife went by inheritance to Claudia dei Medici, the widow of the last Duke of Urbino, Federigo Ubaldo, and thus became a portion of the great Florentine collection.

Dennistoun's description of the picture is in the main a just one, though his remarks on the defective treatment of the landscape in the *trionfi* betray an inclination to refer all achievements to a contemporary standard. The landscape is naturally somewhat archaic; but a very cursory study will reveal the same powers of acute and

<sup>1</sup> Dennistoun, "Dukes of Urbino," vol. i., p. 272.

accurate observation and sympathetic rendering on the part of the painter, the same sure and dexterous handling of colour, which give such a fascination to the landscape—at first sight shapeless enough—in the *Resurrection* at Borgo San Sepolcro. The two portraits mark a great advance in technical skill. Judged by the effigies on coins, and in other pictures, Federigo's likeness is admirable. The attitude of exact profile was doubtless chosen to conceal the loss of the right eye, for which—as well as the broken nose—a jousting accident was accountable. Both the heads are full of life, the colouring is more luminous than anything Piero had before produced, the perspective is perfect, and the rendering of the light, liquid air, with which the depicted objects are surrounded, both in the *trionfi* and in the portraits, is a masterpiece of technique.

The *Altar-piece* in the Ospedale at Borgo San Sepolcro was probably painted soon after 1445, and is therefore considerably earlier than the Montefeltro portraits, which may be referred to the year 1469, or shortly after. As an example of oil painting the Uffizi picture marks a great advance in technique, and its execution shows that Piero must have been a diligent investigator of the properties of the new medium, with the use of which he had certainly been familiar for many years, seeing that the accounts of the Ospedale at Santa Maria Novella show that large quantities of oil were supplied to Domenico Veneziano while he was painting there with Piero as his pupil. Moreover, the contract for the Annunziata banner, painted at Arezzo, specifies that it shall be “lavorato in olio.”<sup>1</sup>

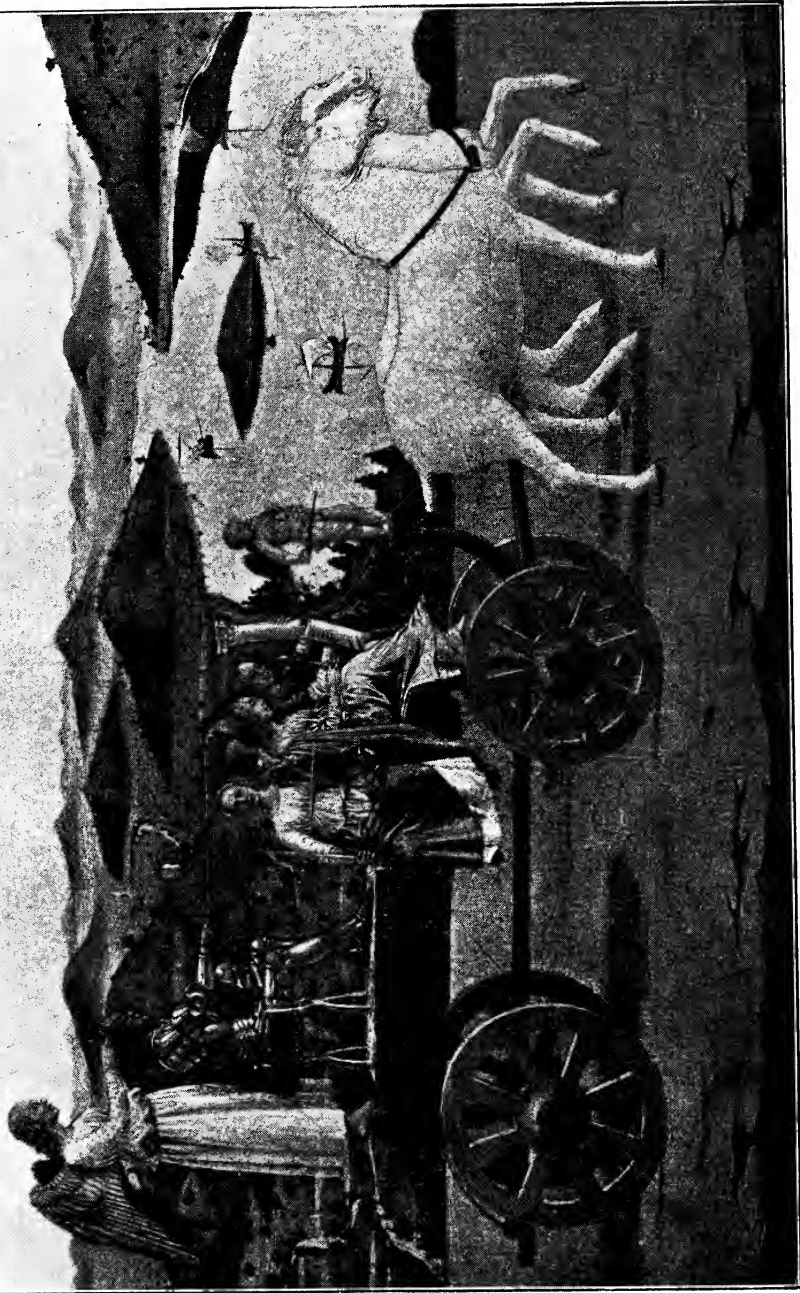
<sup>1</sup> “Giornale storico degli Archivi Toscani,” 1862.

The picture of the *Flagellation* in the sacristy of the cathedral at Urbino, faded and damaged as it is, is a very interesting work, and one over which commentators have spent much ingenuity in endeavouring to elucidate the story it tells. It is divided into two subjects. On the left Pilate sits under an open portico supported by columns resembling those in the fresco of the *Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* at Arezzo. Before him Christ is being scourged, the treatment of this scene being thoroughly conventional. The right of the picture represents a street, enriched with stately houses and loggie, in which stand three figures drawn more than double the size of those on the left, and placed in the immediate foreground of the picture. They are clad in rich apparel, and two of them are evidently intended for portraits, but it has never been clearly settled whom they are supposed to represent ; one theory is that they are meant for the young Duke Od' Antonio and the two evil counsellors who led him to his ruin at the instigation of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, who had always cast envious eyes on the lands of his neighbours at Urbino. The death of Guid' Antonio and the accession of a thoughtless youth like Od' Antonio seemed to offer to Malatesta an opportunity for prosecuting his designs. Over the tragedy of the alleged crimes and the undoubted assassination of the hapless Od' Antonio a mystery still hangs. The popular version of the story is that, soon after the young count's accession, Malatesta sent to Urbino two creatures of his training, Manfredi dei Carpi and Tommaso dell' Agnello, with instructions to gain the confidence of Od' Antonio, and to indoctrinate him by degrees with the nefarious vices of which the

court of Rimini was then the home, his ultimate aim being to render barren the marriage which the count had lately contracted with Isabella, sister of the Marquis of Ferrara, and to stimulate a rising of the people, which would give him a pretext for intervention. The presence of these miscreants soon produced a riot, headed, according to one account, by a chief citizen, Serafino Serafini, whose wife had been violated by Manfredi. The palace was stormed, Manfredi and Tommaso were killed, and, whether by accident or design, the young duke shared their fate. The episode is tragic and dramatic enough, but a glance at the three figures will suggest a doubt whether Piero had it in his mind when he painted this picture.<sup>1</sup> The two outside figures might well be portraits; indeed, the one on the right has a certain resemblance to Duke Federigo, but the one in the centre is manifestly an ideal personage, one which might have been taken direct from the frescoes at Arezzo. His feet and head are bare, and he is clad in a single garment of reddish tint girt round the waist with a band, an eccentric costume for a gallant and courtly prince like Od' Antonio. Dr. Witting<sup>2</sup> puts forward a theory that the right-hand figure represents Duke Federigo, who is giving audience to a certain Venetian, Caterino Zeno (the left-hand figure), who came to Urbino in 1474 as ambassador from Usum Hassan, king of Persia, to enlist Federigo's help in a war against the Turks. The face of this figure has suffered less than either of the others; it is of an eastern type, with black hair and eyes and a swarthy skin. This

<sup>1</sup> Pungileoni, *op. cit.*, p. 12, writes: "co 'ritratti come dicono di tre principi della casa di Monte Feltro."

*Op. cit.*, p. 123.



*Alinari photo*

*[Uffizi Gallery, Florence]*

AN ALLEGORY RELATING TO FEDERIGO, DUKE OF URBINO



personage is richly garbed and wears a heavy turban-shaped cap; and so far Dr. Witting is on fairly firm ground. The Persian ambassador was certainly in Urbino in 1474—probably he paid several visits before this date—and his portrait appears in the famous altarpiece of Justus of Ghent already alluded to; but Dr. Witting is overstraining his inference when he seeks to identify the central figure with some Christian messenger of the gospel in the East who had accompanied the Persian ambassador to the court of “il gran cristiano,” or even with Christ himself.

In any case the introduction of these three figures into a picture, the subject of which is entirely a thing apart, shows a curious throw-back to archaism on the part of the painter. If we except the group on the extreme right of the *Battle of Heraclius* in San Francesco at Arezzo, we shall find no other instance of such incongruity in any of Piero's works. Whatever may have been his motive we cannot divine, but it is surely an unreasoning partiality to a pre-arranged theory which leads a recent writer to maintain that Piero's object was to make his work more “severely impersonal” by introducing “three majestic forms who stand in the very foreground as unconcerned as the everlasting rocks.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a tradition that the picture bore formerly, in addition to the signature, the inscription: “CONVENERUNT IN UNUM,”<sup>2</sup> which is now expunged; but even if this legend were authenticated, it would give little help towards an explanation of the purport of the group. The

<sup>1</sup> Berenson, “Central Italian Painters,” p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Passavant, “Raphael d'Urbino,” vol. i., p. 393.



picture is painted on panel and signed "OPUS PETRI DI BURGO SCI SEPULCHRI."

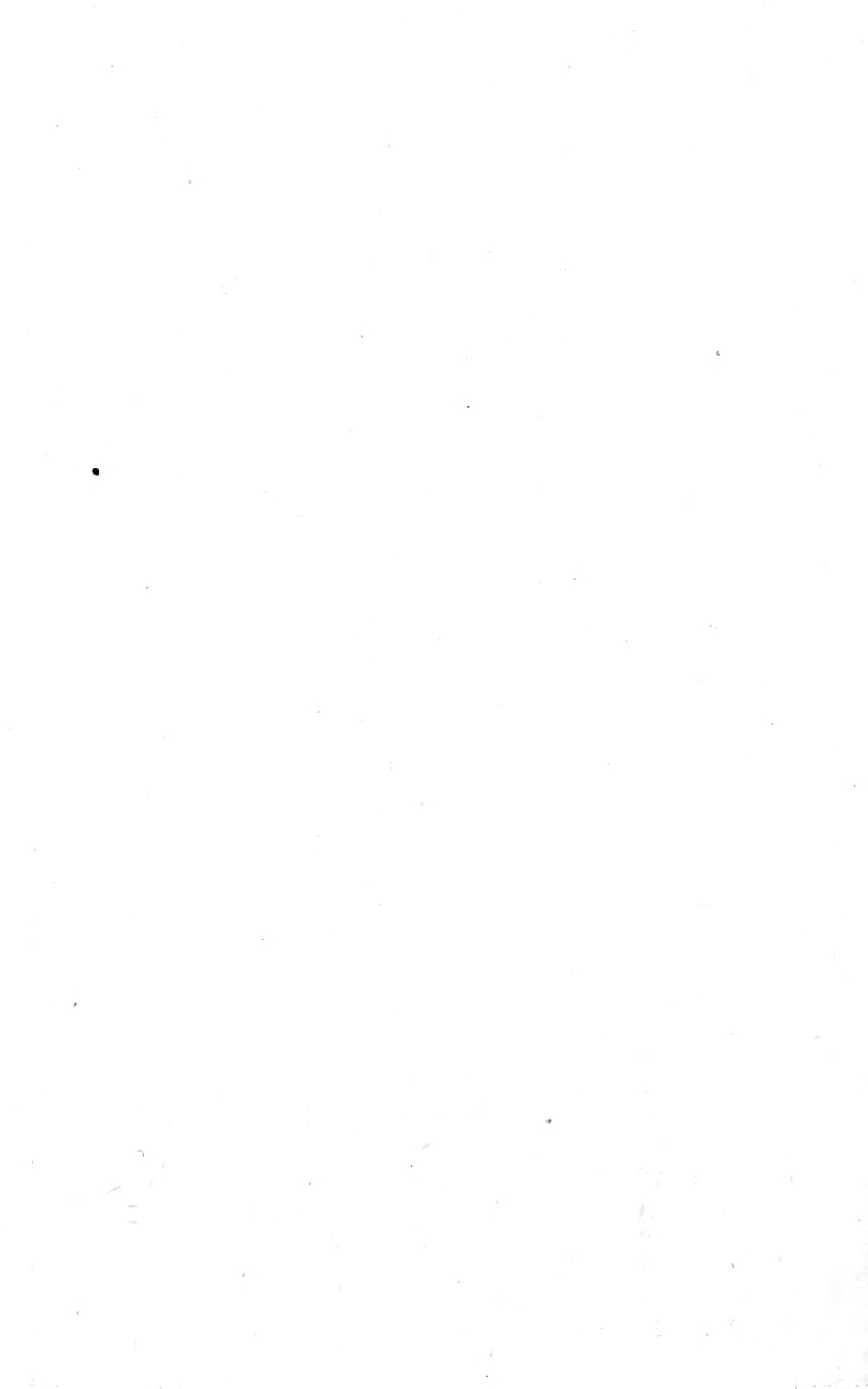
As a painter, Piero is not farther associated with Urbino, but it is evident that to the end of his life he continued to regard it as the congenial art-centre of his country. He left his MS. treatise "De Perspectiva" in the ducal library, and the terms of the dedication of his later work, "Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus"—a work which will be noticed in its due place—to Duke Guidobaldo, show how strong was his gratitude and affection to the youthful prince, and to the memory of his illustrious father.



*Alinari photo]*

*[Brera Gallery, Milan*

THE MADONNA AND CHILD, WITH ANGELS AND SAINTS, AND  
FEDERIGO, DUKE OF URBINO



## CHAPTER VIII

### FERRARA

WITH regard to the sojourn made by Piero in Ferrara, Fra Luca Pacioli—to whom fuller reference will be made when dealing with Piero's works in mathematics and perspective—declares in his treatise on architecture that Piero painted many works in Urbino, Bologna, and Ferrara. Vasari's statements about Piero's presence at Ferrara are more than usually circumstantial, and it is a permissible hypothesis that he repaired to this city some time shortly after Duke Borso's accession. Gustave Gruyer gives 1451 as the date of his visit.<sup>1</sup> The commonly received version of the story, founded on Vasari's remarks, is that while Piero was engaged in painting either at Pesaro or Ancona, he was summoned to Ferrara by Borso, the reigning duke, a noble and generous patron of the arts.

Borso had become Duke of Ferrara in 1450,<sup>2</sup> and at the time of this invitation was probably setting to work on the enlargement and decoration of his palace of Schi-

<sup>1</sup> "L'Art Ferrarais," vol. ii., p. 57.

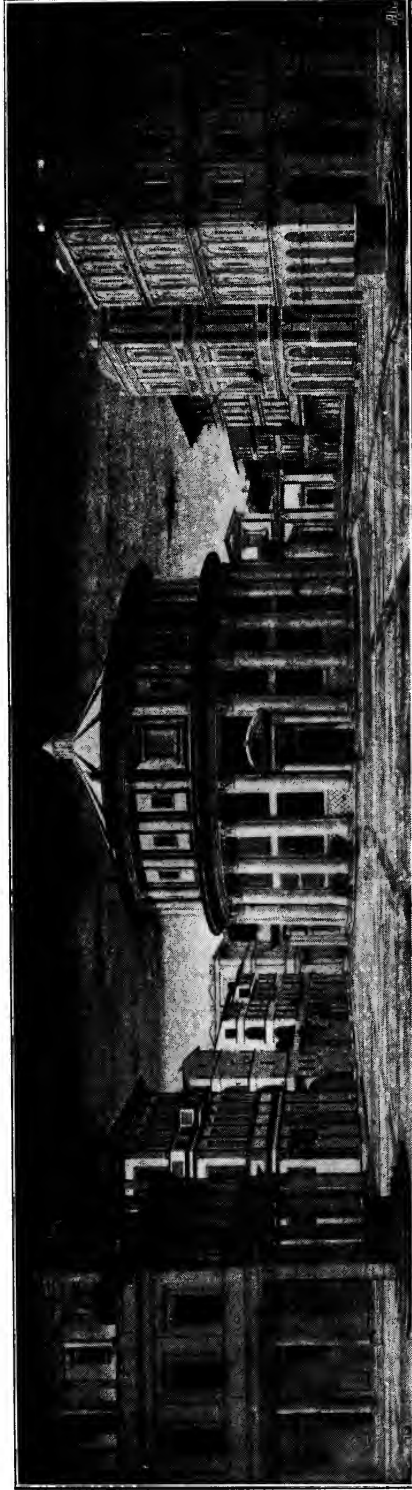
<sup>2</sup> Witting's view is that Piero visited Ferrara immediately after Borso's accession; arguing that, before he painted Sigismondo's fresco at Rimini in 1451, he must have seen a triptych by Roger van der Weyden at Ferrara (*op. cit.*, p. 27). This picture is now missing.

fanoia, which had been built by Duke Niccolo III. in 1391. Borso at once set to work to add a story to this palace; and Vasari's statement, "fu dal duca Borso chiamato a Ferrara, dove nel palazzo dipinse molte camere, che poi furono rovinate dal duca Ercole vecchio per ridurre il palazzo alla moderna,"<sup>1</sup> has been almost universally referred to the Palazzo Schifanoia, and Piero has been identified as the painter who decorated its apartments, but Gustave Gruyer, and Harck,<sup>2</sup> in his exhaustive treatise on the subject, adopt the view that Vasari's reference is made to the Castello, the state residence of the dukes, and not to the Palazzo Schifanoia. Borso died in 1471, and it is certain that Ercole his successor, early in his reign, made extensive alterations in the Castello under the direction of Dosso Dossi, and in the course of these alterations any work by Piero which may have decorated the walls must have perished. Duke Ercole set to work on the reconstruction of the Palazzo Schifanoia as well and, being as keen a patron of the arts as Borso, he at once began to redecorate it, and enlisted the services of the chief Ferrarese painters. At a later period these frescoes were covered with white-wash, which, here as in other known cases, has wrought benefits undreamt of by the whitewashers. This protecting crust was removed in 1840, and the frescoes, in a fair state of conservation, were brought to light.

The later investigations of Gruyer and Harck throw certain fresh light on the subject, though they are not entirely conclusive. The Palazzo Schifanoia was originally all on the ground floor; and the first floor, which

<sup>1</sup> "Vita," vol. ii., p. 491.

<sup>2</sup> "Gli affreschi del Palazzo Schifanoia" (Ferrara, Venturi).



*Alinari photo*]

[*Ducal Palace, Urbino*

## A STUDY OF ARCHITECTURE



contains the existing frescoes, was almost certainly added by Duke Borso, but a statement in Muratori<sup>1</sup> seems to show that it was still incomplete in 1469. It is, however, quite possible that the completion mentioned by Muratori may simply refer to the final touches of decoration, a view which finds confirmation in a recently discovered letter from Francesco Cossa, dated March 25th, 1470,<sup>2</sup> in which it is stated that the existing frescoes were completed somewhere about that date. They occupy the north and east walls, and are evidently homogeneous both in design and in time of execution; the character of the whole work being such as would contradict the view that it was originally executed in Duke Borso's reign, and repaired by other hands later on. On the south and west walls only a few scraps of colour and design remain. Altogether the evidence, which is exceedingly confused and contradictory, seems to point to the conclusion that, while Piero's influence may be plainly detected in certain portions of the frescoes which have been preserved, it is impossible to affirm with certainty that he himself took part in the production of any of the extant work.

In assigning the execution of these frescoes entirely to the initiative of Duke Ercole, a slight difficulty is raised. In almost every group the portrait of Borso appears, and the series is manifestly designed as a testimony of his virtues and beneficence. His relations with Ercole his successor are known to have been cordial and friendly, but at the same time it was not greatly the fashion amongst the Italian rulers of the period for the

<sup>1</sup> Muratori, "*Scrip. Ital.*," vol. xxiv., p. 219.

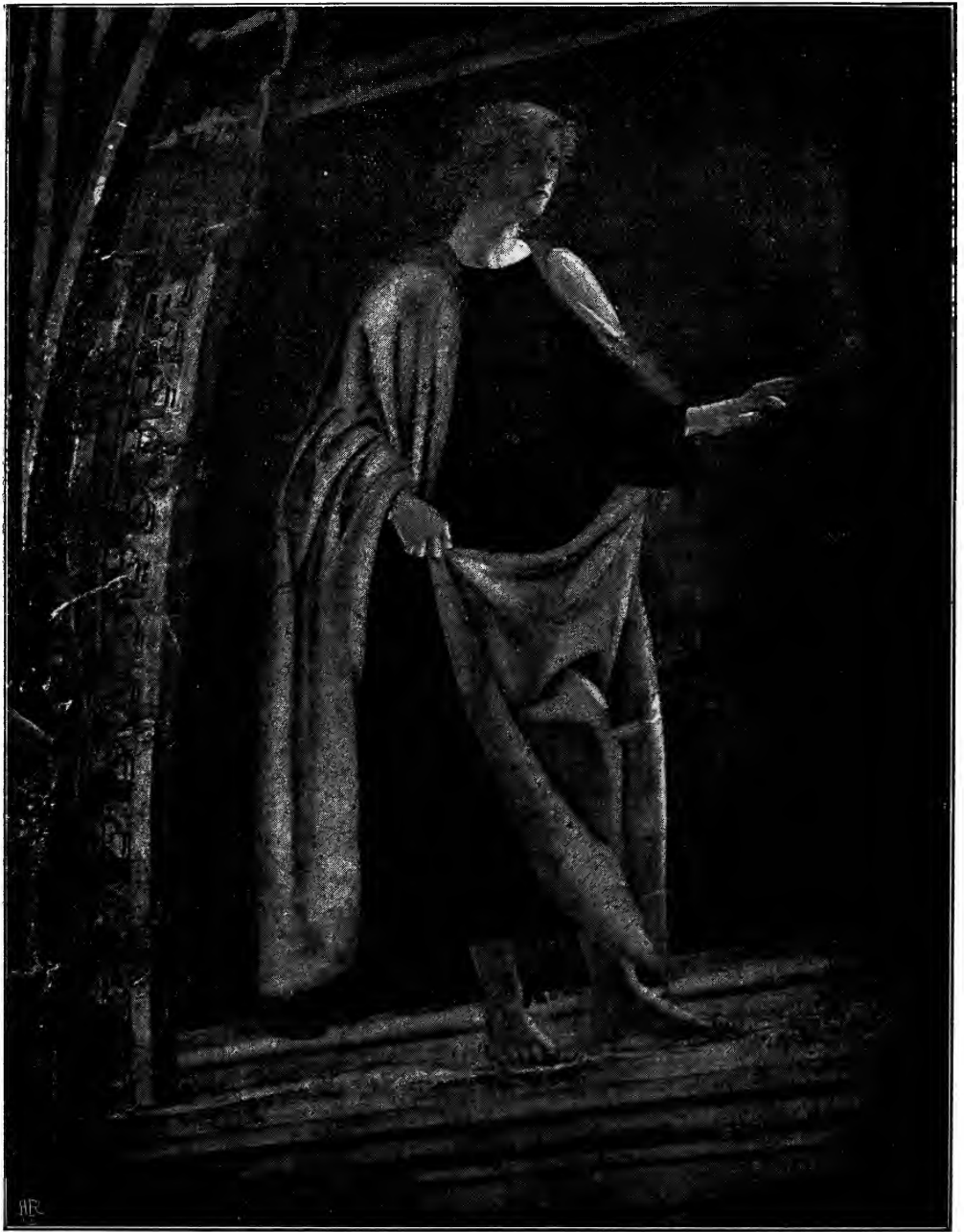
<sup>2</sup> Gruyer, "*L'Art Ferrarais*," vol. i., p. 447.



reigning prince to glorify the memory of his predecessor ; but, given the circumstances of the case, there is no reason to cavil at the possibility of this magnanimous action on the part of Ercole. Another objection which has been raised, that the frescoes must have been painted in Borso's lifetime from the fact that his portrait occurs in them so frequently, is plainly valueless, seeing that medals and portraits of him were abundant, and would have supplied models to the painters.

In spite of the ill-treatment they have received there is still enough remaining of the frescoes in the Palazzo Schifanoia to give a vivid picture of the life and duties of a contemporary Italian prince. Besides the portraits of the duke there are divers effigies of his favourite horses, which are here as abundant and as well drawn as the horses of Federigo Gonzaga in the Palazzo del Te at Mantua. An exact identification of the painters who worked upon the frescoes is impossible. Harck gives to Francesco Cossa the lion's share, with Tura and Schiavone<sup>1</sup> as fellow-workers ; and Gruyer divides the work between Cosimo Tura, Lorenzo Costa, Francesco Cossa, and Galassi. Neither admits that Piero had any actual share in it. Each fresco is divided into three sections. In the centre is painted a sign of the zodiac ; above it some subject relating to the presiding deity, and below it a scene from Borso's public or private life. In March, over the sign of Aries, Minerva is represented drawn by a pair of unicorns on a car not unlike the one in the *Triumph of the Duchess Battista* in the Uffizi. On her left women are spinning and weaving, and on the right

<sup>1</sup> Judging from Schiavone's extant work it seems improbable that he had any share in these frescoes.



*Alinari photo]*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo*

PORTRAIT OF A YOUTH



stands a group of lawyers. Below, Borso gives judgment in a suit. In April, above the sign of Taurus, Venus is drawn in a bark of swans and holds Mars captive, while on the banks youths and maidens and doves are in tender dalliance. In the lower space Borso makes a gift to his fool, and witnesses a donkey race. Above Gemini, Apollo is seated on a car with a group of poets, and below Borso is returning from the chase. Mercury, representing music and pastoral life, is over Cancer. Jupiter and Ceres appear severally over the Lion and the Virgin; and over Libra is a strangely conceived subject of a woman in a car drawn by apes, meant to typify sensuality, the allegory being carried out by representations of the Workshop of Vulcan and Venus and Mars ensnared. In this series the upper portions of the subjects devoted to Aries, Taurus, and Gemini show the strongest resemblance to Piero's style.

These stray facts constitute all the information available as to Piero's connection with any existing paintings in Ferrara; and the case, being one in which evidence is almost entirely lacking, has given rise to numerous hypotheses as to the date of Piero's sojourn, and as to his share in the decoration of the Palazzo Schifanoia. The only statements to be considered are that Piero went to Ferrara on the invitation of Duke Borso, and executed certain works, and that in the Palazzo Schifanoia at the present time is a series of frescoes which, if untouched by Piero's hand, at least show strong signs of his informing spirit.

Cosimo Tura, the recognized head of the school of Ferrara, had been taught by Squarcione, and the hardness of the Paduan style is apparent in an exaggerated degree

in his earlier work.<sup>1</sup> The recent criticisms of Harck and Gruyer assign to him a large portion of the Schifanoia frescoes, but in none of them is there any resemblance to the style of his early pictures, and the most striking variations are exactly such as would have been brought about by the study of Piero's methods, most likely in the works executed for Duke Borso in the Castello. In the frescoes attributed to Tura there is a softening of line, and a more gracious sense of colour, and a general relaxation of the rigid classicism of the Paduan type. Amongst the frescoes assigned to Cossa the influence of Piero is no less apparent. The half-clad man who holds the key of Spring in the middle of the April group, and the general treatment of the upper portion of the March compartment, may be given as special instances. Moreover, the draperies and the pose of several of the female figures are almost the same as those of the Queen of Sheba and the Empress Helena in the frescoes at Arezzo. And Galassi, one of the earliest of the Ferrarese painters, to whom Gruyer assigns a share in the Schifanoia frescoes was, according to Baruffaldi,<sup>2</sup> a pupil of Piero.

It will thus appear that the story of the Sala dell' Eldorado is here repeated with a slight variation. In both cases tradition points to Piero as the painter of certain frescoes which have disappeared indeed, but which, during the period of their existence, were real and stimulating sources of inspiration; centres from which radiated the vivifying influences under which Art shook off its fetters, and attained its culminating point of excellence.

<sup>1</sup> Notably in the *St. Jerome* in the Pinacoteca at Ferrara, and in No. 773 in the National Gallery.

<sup>2</sup> "Vite dei pittori e scultori Ferraresi" (Ferrara, 1844), i. 50.



*Alinari photo]*

*[Church of San Francesco, Arezzo*

PORTRAIT OF A MAN



## CHAPTER IX

### THE TREATISE ON PERSPECTIVE

FRA LUCA PACIOLI, one of the most distinguished mathematicians of the age and a fellow-townsmen of Piero, has had the misfortune to incur the censure of Vasari, who wantonly, if not malevolently, accused him of having appropriated without acknowledgment Piero's discoveries in mathematics—"tutte le fatiche di quel buon vecchio"—and of having passed them off as his own in his "Somma di Aritmetica," which he published in 1494.<sup>1</sup> Lanzi, in his "History of Italian Painting," has repeated this charge, but the reports given elsewhere of Fra Luca's character, and the invariably affectionate and enthusiastic tone of his remarks concerning Piero, all tend to discredit Vasari's statement. Moreover, Piero's proficiency as a geometrician was well known, and any theft of this kind would have certainly been detected at once; but no one before Vasari ever accused Fra Luca.<sup>2</sup> In his subsequent work, "De Di-

<sup>1</sup> Vasari's accusation is circumstantial enough: "Perchè Maestro Luca dal Borgo, frate di S. Francesco, che scrisse de' corpi regolari di geometria fu suo discepolo: e venuto Piero in vecchiezza ed a morte, dopo avere scritto molti libri, Maestro Luca detto, usurpandoli per se stesso, gli fece stampare come suoi" ("Vita," vol. ii., p. 498).

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe Bossi, in his work on Leonardo's *Cenacolo* (Milan, 1810), deals minutely with this controversy.



vina Proportione," published in 1509, Fra Luca promised to publish, at some future time, an account of all Piero's works on Perspective, a promise he could hardly have given if he had really used any special discovery of Piero's and claimed it as his own. In the same work he also reproduces some drawings of heads, taken from Piero's treatise on perspective, but Vasari's charge could hardly have been made on the strength of such an innocent borrowing as this. Vasari, however, in the second edition of the "Lives" which he published in 1560, made an alteration which suggests that he may have realized the injustice of his attack on Fra Luca; that is to say, he omitted from this edition an epitaph which he had composed for Piero, the terms of which repeat with acerbity the charge aforesaid. The epitaph runs as follows:

"Geometra e Pittor', penna e pennello  
Così ben' misi in opra; che natura  
Condannò le mie luci a notte scura  
Mossa da invidia; e de le mie fatiche  
Che le carte allumar dotte ed antiche,  
L'empio discepolo mio fatto si è bello."

Several copies of Piero's MS. of the "Prospettiva Pingendi" are known to exist. One is in the Saibanti Library in Verona; another in the Ambrosiana in Milan; another—once in the Library at Urbino—in the Vatican; another in Parma; another in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris; and another in the British Museum.

Fra Luca dedicates his "Summa" to Duke Guidobaldo of Urbino, and writes: "Perspective, if closely considered, will show that it could not exist but for geometry, a fact which has been clearly demonstrated by Piero della Francesca, my contemporary and the

prince of modern painters" ; and again (Tit. I., Art. ii.), after referring to the province of perspective in art, he goes on : " Thus, in placing a figure on a particular plane it is necessary to let it appear in exact proportion to its distance from the eye, and to give to the draperies their natural form. In drawing a seated figure it must be proportioned so that it would not strike the head against the ceiling in rising. And the illustrious painter, Messer Pieri delli Franceschi, my townsman, has recently written a most excellent work on the art of Perspective."<sup>1</sup> This is scarcely the tone of a literary robber. Fra Luca, as pupil, may have set down in his book much that he learned from Piero as teacher ; but this is surely the universal relation of pupil and teacher. Piero, it may be noted, though he was a skilled geometrician, had no claim to rank in this field of knowledge with Fra Luca, who was one of the leading mathematicians of the age.

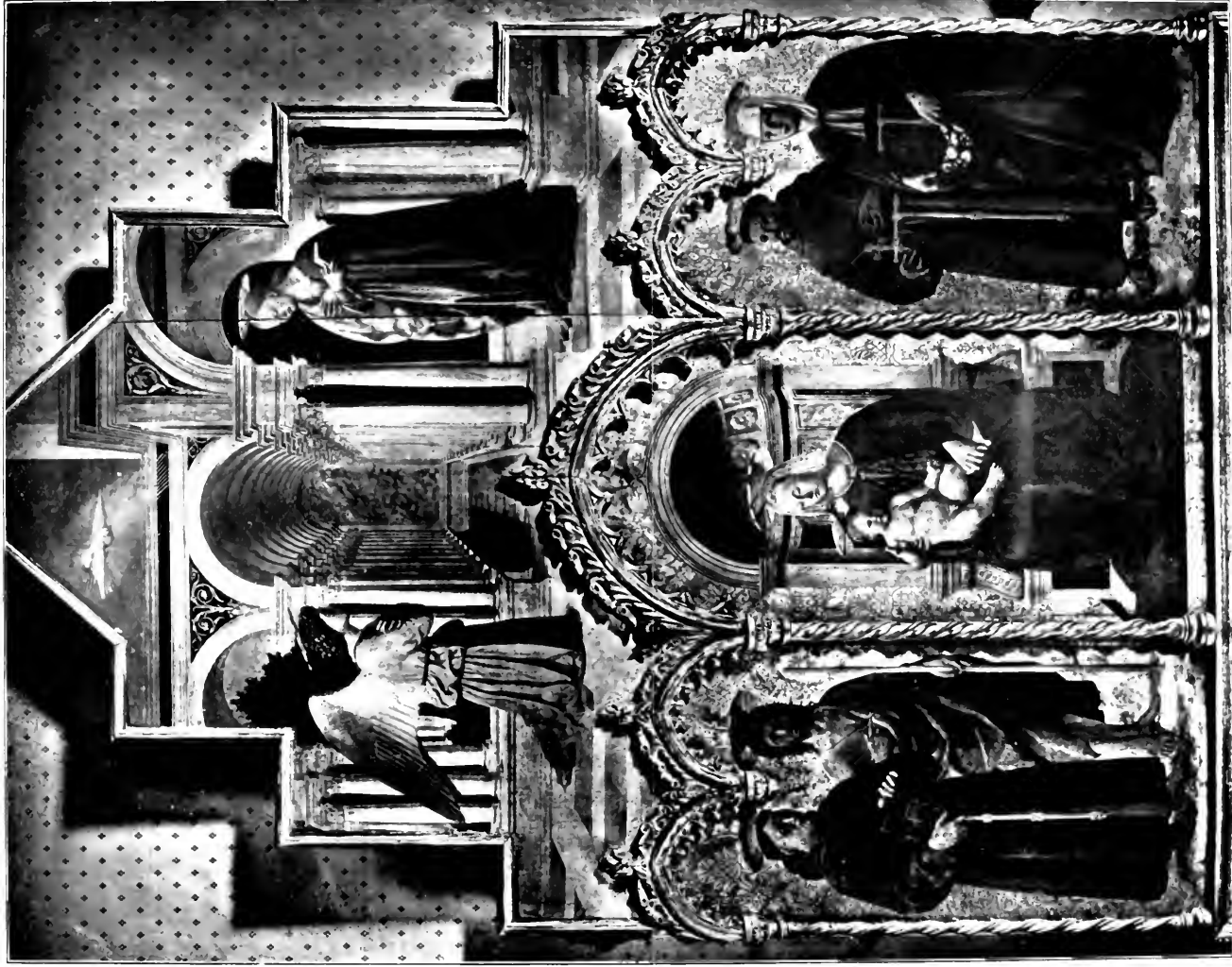
Up to the beginning of the fifteenth century perspective was in the empiric stage. Men were content to work by experiment alone, and Brunelleschi, following this course, astonished the men of theory, and the men of practice as well, by rearing the dome of St. Maria dei

<sup>1</sup> In the dedication of the "Summa" Fra Luca writes as if Piero were still living : "a li di nostri ancor vivente maestro Piero." Piero was no doubt alive when these words were written, and Fra Luca forgot to make the correction before publication in 1494. There is also a tradition that Piero painted a portrait of Fra Luca, "Non vi fu pittore, scultore o architetto de' suoi tempi che seco non contrahesse strettissima amicitia, tra quali vi fu Pietro de' Franceschi suo compatriota, pittore eccellentissimo e prospettivo, di mano de cui si conserva ne la Guardarobba de' nostri serenissimi principi in Urbino il ritratto al naturale d'esso Frate Luca" ("Vasari," vol. ii., p. 498, note).

Fiori at Florence. Shortly afterwards the study of Euclid led to investigation as to how principles might be settled on a scientific basis, and Paolo Toscanella and Manetti became the teachers of Uccello and Leo Battista Alberti; the last named, indeed, undertook to find a scientific foundation for Brunelleschi's achievements, and to advance them still further. Alberti had a clear notion of the art of delineation, but his intellect failed to advance any further than the teaching of proportion and of visual angles on the basis of Euclid. His "*Trattato della Pittura*" was, indeed, little else than a dissertation on optics.

At the outset of his "*Treatise on Perspective*" Piero lets it be seen that he fully realizes the importance of his task, and that he proposes to elucidate his meaning by scientific treatment of the entire theory. He leaves design and colour aside, and deals with perspective alone. His method is simple and coherent, each problem being explained by those which have preceded it: he states the problem in a few words, and gives the solution by means of drawings and explanatory letters. In the first book he treats of his subject by the help of the figures commonly used in Geometry, that is, the point and the line and the level surface. In the second book he deals with regular figures, and in the third with irregular. He does not presuppose any knowledge of the vanishing point; he insists simply that the lines of a square surface if produced must converge, and sets forth that, if the back line of such a surface be drawn parallel with the figure plane, it becomes an easy matter to determine the correct perspective of this surface; for, the extreme points being fixed, diagonal lines may be drawn through

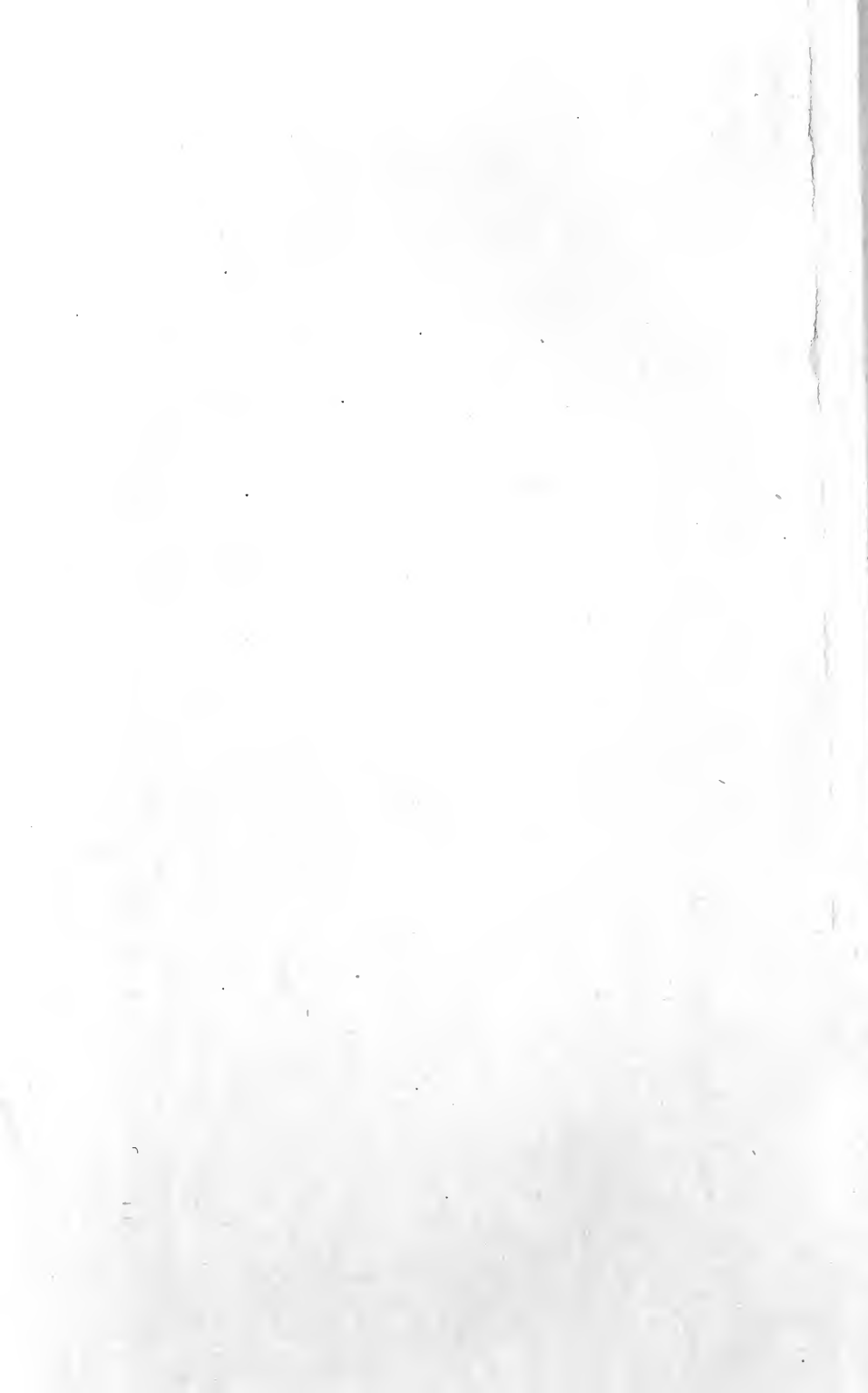




*Undersø, photo*

*Photostat, Pissarro*

AT THE FEET OF THE VIRGIN AND CHILD AND SAINTS, AND OF THE ANNUNCIATION



it, and any point within its limits correctly located. Also, if this same flat surface be set upright, all the vertical points therein may be determined in like manner. By this simple and ingenious process Piero formulates and establishes a rule for the solution of the elementary difficulties of perspective.

Piero really took up Alberti's teaching, which was based not so much on general principles as on geometrical and optical experiments, and carried on the science of perspective to the point at which it remained for several centuries, until the theory of the vanishing point was finally established. Baldassare Peruzzi was a diligent student of the "*Prospettiva*," and wrote several commentaries on it, and, together with Daniele Bartolo, Romano Alberti, and divers others, has left his testimony to Piero's merits as a geometrician.

Piero's other work, the "*Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus*,"<sup>1</sup> is a treatise on the practical application of Euclid's propositions to the needs of Art, which propositions, up to his time, could only be worked out by roundabout methods. The five bodies in question are the triangle with four bases, the cube with six faces, the octohedron with eight faces and as many triangles, the dodecahedron with twelve faces and as many pentagons, and the icosahedron with twenty faces and as many triangles.

Piero dedicates this treatise to Duke Guidobaldo of Urbino, and writes as follows : "And as my works owe

<sup>1</sup> This, being a somewhat abstruse work, was written in Latin, while the "*Prospettiva*," intended for the use of all artists, is in Italian. Certain remarks at the end of the dedication show that it was written after the "*Prospettiva*."

whatever illustration they possess solely to the brilliant star of your excellent father, the most bright and dazzling orb of our age, it seemed not unbecoming that I should dedicate to your Majesty this little work on the five regular bodies in mathematics which I have composed, that, in this extreme fraction of my age, my mind might not become torpidly inactive. Thus may your splendour reflect a light upon its obscurity, and Your Highness will not spurn these feeble and worthless fruits gathered from a field now left fallow, and nearly exhausted by age, from which your distinguished father has drawn its better produce, but will place this in some corner as a humble handmaid to the numberless books of your own and his copious library near our other treatise on perspective which we wrote in former years.”<sup>1</sup>

These words must have been written after Guidobaldo's accession in 1482, and they go to prove that Piero was active and in full enjoyment of his faculties in old age. They give, moreover, a pleasant glimpse of the kindly feeling subsisting between the accomplished young prince and the illustrious artist and man of science, and show that Piero's relations with the son were as cordial as they had been with the father. Piero left the MS. of this work in the library at Urbino, from whence it was carried off to Rome during the usurpation of Cæsar Borgia.

Of the latter portion of Piero's life scarcely anything is known. He seems to have been at Borgo San Sepolcro in 1469, the year when he signed the receipt for the balance due for the altar-piece in the church of

<sup>1</sup> Dennistoun, "Dukes of Urbino" vol. ii., p. 196.



Sant' Agostino, which he had begun in 1454; and then, until 1478, there is a complete blank. In 1478 the Compagnia della Misericordia at Borgo gave him a commission to paint the fresco already referred to,<sup>1</sup> which Vasari mentions and which has now perished. On July 5th, 1487, he made his will, and on October 12th, 1492, he died and was buried in the church of the Badia—now the cathedral—at Borgo San Sepolcro.

Vasari's remark that Piero became blind in his old age<sup>2</sup> may reasonably be added to the list of his misstatements. Arguments against its validity are not far to seek. Fra Luca, who never loses an opportunity of recording facts concerning his master, is entirely silent on this point; and it is hard to believe that a fact so salient would have been unnoticed by him. If dates are compared, fresh proof will appear. Vasari gives Piero's age at his death as eighty-six. The records at Borgo fix his death accurately as occurring in 1492; wherefore, if all these figures are correct, he must have been born in 1406, and have lost his sight in 1466, a year when he was actively engaged in painting at Borgo and at Arezzo, and three years before his summons to Urbino, where he painted some of his most delicately finished work. Moreover, Vasari records that he executed the *Misericordia* fresco at Borgo San Sepolcro, a work which is known to have been painted after 1478. An expression in his will, which he made in 1487, describing

<sup>1</sup> Page 58.

<sup>2</sup> "Piero Borghese le cui pitture furono intorno agli anni 1458 d'anni sessanta per un cattaro accecò, e così visse insino all' anno ottantasei della sua vita" ("Vita," vol. ii., p. 500). Lanzi says Piero was blind in 1458.

himself as "sanus mente intellectū et corpore," is hardly one which a blind man would have used or permitted ; and, as a final contradiction to Vasari's statement, it may be noted that Piero was able to dedicate his work, "Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus" to Duke Guidobaldo of Urbino, who had succeeded to his inheritance as late as 1482.

## CHAPTER X

### THE CHARM OF PIERO—HIS PLACE IN ART

AT the time of Piero's birth the prevailing art influence throughout Central Italy was unquestionably Sienese. At Orvieto Simone Martini had painted his remarkable picture of the *Virgin and Saints* for the church of San Domenico, and had left other work of his to stand beside Giotto's at Assisi, where also Pietro Lorenzetti had covered with frescoes the roofs of several of the transepts. At Città di Castello this same Lorenzetti painted a *Virgin and Child with Angels* for the church of San Domenico; at Arezzo in Santa Maria della Pieve a polyptych of *Madonna and Saints*; and at Cortona a *Madonna and Angels* in the Duomo, and a crucifix in the church of San Marco. At Asciano Domenico di Bartolo, Lippo Memmi, and Taddeo di Bartoli painted altar-pieces in several of the churches; and at Perugia Piero might well have seen and studied pictures by Duccio, Domenico di Bartolo, Taddeo di Bartoli, and Gentile da Fabriano, while at Gubbio Ottaviano Nelli had decorated with frescoes the church of Santa Maria Novella and several others.

Thus the principal pictorial creations which were brought before the eyes of Piero as a youth in the towns adjacent to his birthplace were for the most part produced by men in whom the primitive inspiration had

been modified, and the faculty of representation helped onward by the peculiar qualities of Sienese teaching. These men held the field in his youth, but a farther and more momentous period of advance was at hand. Their traditions and method waned before those which followed the rise of Masaccio, and the manifestation of Donatello's powers: events which gave to art the most effective impulse it had yet received, and made their influence felt far and wide. Andrea dal Castagno and Domenico Veneziano were the earliest and most illustrious of those who took up the new teaching; so, when Piero was old enough to learn, he went for training and inspiration to the works of men who had formed their style by a study of Masaccio and Donatello, and found himself urged on towards the adoption of the new traditions before his method had become fixed on conventional lines. In brief retrospect it may be noted that the central Italian school of painting, after the primal momentum given to it by the two great contemporary masters, Duccio and Giotto, was forced onward by successive manifestations of the art spirit issuing respectively from Siena and Florence. In the beginning Giotto unquestionably held the field against his great compeer, but after his death came that Sienese movement, which by its feeling for beauty of line subdued the austerity of Giotto's style. Then came the second great Florentine outburst which under Masaccio's direction, launched the art of painting in the course it has pursued with slight variation ever since. It was a happy conjunction when Piero was born into a world which was just opening its eyes to the new light.

It is possible that too great importance has been

attached to Piero's achievements on the scientific side of art. No claim which aims at marking him as the discoverer of perspective can be seriously entertained; but his eulogists, though they stop short of this, affirm that Paolo Uccello and Brunelleschi were little better than perspectivists by rule of thumb, and that Piero it was who first raised perspective to the dignity of a science, and that no one before his time had ever duly applied it to the delineation of the human form. There is a certain ground for this claim, but its validation is of little importance in settling the question of his place in the hierarchy of art. He undoubtedly drew his figures with more knowledge than Masaccio, but it would be rash to assert that he always drew them with greater grace or accuracy.

Piero had an important share in bringing to perfection the medium of painting. He adopted the method which Antonello da Messina is said to have learnt from some Flemish master,<sup>1</sup> and expended great care and trouble in patient experiments for its improvement. He painted his lights with clear colour, using the same tint somewhat darkened for the shadows. The medium tints are always cool and reticent, and the flesh tones warmed with a due amount of colour. The delicacy of chiaroscuro which he achieved was largely the result of fine and transparent glazings, and few painters in any age have excelled him in the faculty of illumination of flesh tints.<sup>2</sup> When he

<sup>1</sup> Piero almost certainly studied the use of oil as a medium while painting with Domenico Veneziano at Florence: some years before Antonello was born, Cennini writes that the Florentine painters of the fourteenth century knew the use of oil.

<sup>2</sup> In certain of his pictures—notably in the faces of the angels in

set to work to paint drapery he began fearlessly with a scheme of primitive colours which he toned down gradually to a just balance of values, so that the general effect might ultimately be one of complete harmony.

In the distribution of light and shade he displayed a knowledge and dexterity which were equally remarkable. Seldom or ever does he concentrate the light in one point of his picture; he rather treats each field of illumination by itself, and gives to each tint its proper local depth within the plane of the group or scene portrayed—notable examples of this characteristic being the two smaller frescoes above the *Victory of Constantine* in San Francesco at Arezzo. A particular study of chiaroscuro indeed may be found in almost any portion of any picture from his brush. In this respect his method finds its direct contrary in that of Rembrandt, who in his typical works depends for effect upon the condensation of all his light upon one single spot, an illuminated point in a firmament of obscure canvas.

It is in the drawing of architectural accessories that Piero shows the most marked superiority to his predecessors and contemporaries, but this result probably arose from the fact that he attached greater importance to these accessories, and deemed them worthy of the best work he could give. It is not safe to assume that the painters before the revival ignored landscape and the beauty of the human form, or gave to the same an uncomely or amorphous rendering through mere incapacity. They treated with neglect subjects like these, or slurred the *Baptism* in the National Gallery—the underlying impasto seems to have suffered some change which has affected the modelling.

them over, because, infected with cloistral influences, they deemed them worthy of no better usage. Nature and man himself were accounted worthless, or even noxious, as themes for illustration. They still seemed to suggest something of the pagan spirit in Art which the early Christians had exorcised as unclean, when they demolished the temples and broke the images of the gods; but had these themes, as details, appeared as important to the primitive painters as geometrical perspective appeared to Piero, it is probable that even the earliest and most ascetic of them would have worked with care and diligence, and perchance have produced bits of nature as charming as those which adorn the backgrounds of Perugino or of Titian himself.

The longer and the more attentively Piero's work is studied, the plainer it will be manifest that the cause of the peculiar charm which he exercises—a charm which compels the respect even of those who carp at a tendency, as they allege, to ignore the claims of beauty of form and expression—does not lie merely in his technical excellence, or in his wide knowledge of his art. This charm begins to operate as soon as the onlooker realizes in Piero the possessor of a certain mysterious power, a power denied to crowds of men who have equalled or even surpassed him in excellence of workmanship. This power was the gift which made him the great man he was, and to speculate as to its source would be labour in vain. One instance, perhaps, may be quoted to show how vast may be the loss consequent on its absence—to wit, the instance of Correggio. Correggio had talents of the first order, a marvellous sense of beauty and sureness of execution, but with all these gifts his works

miss the point of consummate achievement, and do not leave on the mind an impression at all commensurate with that which Piero's creations seldom fail to produce upon those who have studied them with care and intelligence.

The portrait fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta at Rimini—though it cannot be regarded as Piero's most attractive work—is second to none as an illustration of his peculiar gift. In the description of the picture already given, reference was made to the wonderful restraint displayed by Piero in treatment, and to the marvellous result attained. In this creation, more than in any other, Piero, by the application of his well-trained hand and his well-stored mind to the precious gifts bestowed on him by nature, has produced a work which, as a manifestation of absolute sincerity and originality of treatment, is equalled by few extant examples of the portrait art. Not one superfluous stroke has been used in presenting the subject: and in spite of this reticence it is impossible to stand before this fresco without realizing, albeit imperfectly, the immense power of the intellect which produced it.

Piero's nature was one of those richly endowed ones which the fifteenth century produced in such rare abundance: a nature which, realizing to the full the real significance of art, gave itself up wholly to the fulfilment of its mission, and found its fellows in the immortal personalities of Brunelleschi, Leo Battista Alberti, and Leonardo. Piero, indeed, was lacking in the versatility of these: but, if his field was somewhat narrow, his vision was as clear as theirs, and no artist ever set to work with a more certain notion of the task to be accomplished. And he did not



spare himself. Painting, as he found it, lacked the precision and sureness of touch which he regarded as essential. It must not be supposed that he studied geometry for its own sake: he troubled himself with it simply because in it he recognized the most efficient instrument for bringing his art to perfection.

In literature and in art as well, the student will light now and again upon striking figures which, if for no other reason, compel attention from the fact that they stand apart, upon pedestals of their own. Piero della Francesca is one of these great solitary figures in the world of Art, and there are not many of them. To take Duccio, Giotto, and all the masters of the Sienese and Florentine schools down to the time of Masaccio; all of these borrowed from their forerunners (Duccio from the Byzantines), and handed down a legacy of form and colour to their successors, thus producing a sequence of pictorial examples which all show signs of descent from the first recognized progenitor of the line, modified here and there by the more potent individuality of some transmitter of the legend. Amongst the Florentines, the Lombards, the Venetians, and the Central Italians after the revival, a similar phenomenon is to be observed, but Piero more than any master of any of the schools aforesaid stands aloof.

We are taught that certain men were his masters, and that the work of certain other painters helped to form his style. It is not difficult to detect in the *Virgin Enthroned*, and in the two heads of saints in the National Gallery by Domenico Veneziano, traces of the informing spirit which affected the beginning of Piero's method. The noble simplicity of Domenico's figures,

the dignified reticence of the faces (Donatello's influence is here plainly manifest) and the carefully drawn and richly painted draperies of these compositions are all reproduced in the subsequent works of his great pupil. The striving after correct drawing, which is apparent in the lines of the marble chair occupied by the Virgin in the National Gallery picture, shows that Domenico had at least the sense of perspective, though the mistakes, which must affront even the eye of a novice, prove that he was still in the empiric stage.

Domenico's most marked characteristic is the grandeur of his conception of the human form, and the supremacy he gives to it in the scheme of his compositions. In the London *Madonna*, signs of the influence of Angelico are apparent; but these grow less in the *Virgin and Saints* in the Uffizi, and in the fresco figures of two saints in Santa Croce<sup>1</sup> they disappear entirely. Domenico felt and manifested freely the spirit of the revival; he lived in the full vigour of the early spring, and handed on to his pupil a virtue which was yet waxing and unfolding. To judge aright of work executed in this era of spontaneous vigour, it is only necessary to place it beside some product of an age of stagnancy or decay, some smooth, showy canvas of the mannerist period, the result of eyesight sated by the contemplation of pictorial achievement of all degrees of merit, and too weary and too imperfectly disciplined to return to nature.

Andrea Castagno, Domenico's contemporary, is often cited as one of those whose work and teaching helped to form Piero's style, and this contention is just.

<sup>1</sup> This work was until recently attributed to Castagno.

Castagno had the gift of letting his figures stand firmly on their feet and in perfect balance, a gift which he handed on to Piero. Piero's figures, even in his early works, are posed with dignity and certitude; and no figures of his are more reminiscent of Castagno's handling than the Sant' Andrea and the San Sebastian in the *Misericordia* altar-piece at San Sepolcro.

An examination of Andrea's fresco of the *Resurrection* at Sant' Apollonia in Florence will show another instance. The figure of Christ standing upon the edge of the tomb, the cold clear sky of morning, and the background of trees might well have been in Piero's mind when he conceived the scheme of his fresco of the same subject at Borgo San Sepolcro; while many others of his figures are strongly reminiscent of the drawings of sybils and warriors by Castagno, which have been brought to Sant' Apollonia from the Villa Legnaia, near Florence. Judging from the stately usage Piero followed in posing his figures, it may be inferred with reason that he also felt directly Donatello's influence during his student life at Florence as Domenico's pupil. Possibly the spectacle of certain treasures of classical antiquity may have affected him as well; but in his case classical influences were far less potent than they were in that of Mantegna. Finally, during his career as a student, he must frequently have come across the work of Fra Angelico and Benozzo Gozzoli; but whether he studied them or not, they assuredly left no trace on his style, which finally emerged entirely free from the superficiality of Gozzoli, and from the monkish restraint of Angelico.

## CHAPTER XI

### HIS INFLUENCE AND POWER

WITH regard to Piero's two great pupils, Luca Signorelli and Melozzo da Forli, men in whom indications of his teaching might reasonably be anticipated, it is a difficult matter to cite any plain and unmistakable examples of his influence in the work of either of them, apart from a broad and open method of treatment and in certain details of technique. Melozzo took from his master the characteristic Umbrian sense of space, and displayed rare skill in its application, notably in the great portrait group of Federigo di Montefeltro and his son in the gallery at Windsor. Melozzo, more than any other painter, learned the secret whereby Piero was able to invest his figures with that incomparable severity and dignified simplicity which is his most marked characteristic. In his single figures this trait is especially striking, and it also characterizes those in the transferred fresco of *Sixtus IV. and his Cardinals*, now in the Pinacoteca at the Vatican. In this composition the careful drawing of the architectural details, the attention shown to perspective, the accurate apportionment of each figure to the space it fills, the arrangement of the masses of light and shade, and the typical Umbrian rendering of the draperies are all the effects of Piero's teaching. Melozzo seems to have been a diligent student

of perspective.<sup>1</sup> In his maturity he evidently studied the works of Mantegna, and let his style be influenced by the great Paduan master.

Of Melozzo's separate figures—which on the whole show Piero's influence more strongly than the groups—the best known are two figures in the museum at Berlin, *Dialectics* and *Astronomy*, and two others in the National Gallery, *Music* and *Rhetoric*. All these were originally in the palace at Urbino, and are painted in strict adherence to the rules which govern the design of figures placed high in an apartment, and only to be seen from below. Also, there are some remarkable fragments of his work preserved in the Sacristy of St. Peter's at Rome: heads of angels singing and playing divers instruments.

Luca Signorelli, the greater pupil of a great master, without doubt acquired from Piero that indescribable sense of dignity and reticence which in certain cases serves to mitigate the faulty composition. The eye may be conscious that the field is overcrowded, that the grouping is confused and ill-balanced, but it will be equally conscious that each individual figure is dignified, simple, and noble. The exuberance of Signorelli's fancy must almost certainly have been held back from eccentric manifestations by the traditions of his master's method, but these points being touched little else remains to be said. In every other respect Signorelli is to a far greater extent the artistic son of Pollaiuolo than of Piero della Francesca; indeed, if the architectural features

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Santi writes in his rhymed chronicle:

“Non lasciando Melozzo a me sì caro  
Che in prospettiva ha steso tanto il passo.”

in certain of his pictures are omitted—for example, in the *Annunciation* at Volterra, which might well have been inspired by a similar detail in Piero's rendering of the same subject in the Pinacoteca at Perugia—there is little executive resemblance to his master's individual style in any of his productions.

From this brief consideration of Piero's natural tendencies it will appear that in dealing with him we stand face to face with one endowed with certain extraordinary qualities ; to wit, a pregnant brain and a virility of genius which gave to the world a type which no one had yet produced : a type which for stateliness and sincerity has never been excelled ; and along with these positive qualities we may note a negative one which we cannot but deplore. This was his inability to transmit these astonishing qualities to his successors. This gift he could not impart as he could the knowledge of perspective, of chiar-oscuro, of accurate composition, and the due adjustment of planes. This apparent failing on his part may peradventure have arisen from the fact that during his lifetime he met with no nature sufficiently sympathetic with his own to take from him the greatest treasure he had to leave.

When once the charm and mystery of Piero's work are fully realized, it will be clearly manifest that this work is not the mere reproduction of impressions received. Piero's mind was one of those powerfully working ones which transform the essence as well as the form of the material upon which they operate. In the fiery furnace of his nature the images he may have incorporated in his fancy were not simply stamped with the mark of his individuality ; they were resolved, transmuted, and re-

produced in forms incomparably more noble and precious than the originals. Either from the maintenance of his faculties at this tense strain of emotion, or from the want of a duly qualified successor, he was apparently doomed to sterility, so far as the transmission of his higher gifts was concerned. That inherent force of his nature which could strike so strong and unmistakable a stamp upon his own productions could go no farther, but seemed to spend itself in the creative effort.

[It would be idle to maintain, or even to suggest, that a man of Piero's power and originality could spend his life in such magnificent achievement and still exercise no influence upon the men around him, or over those who came after him. The view which has been here advanced goes no farther than to suggest that, while he distributed liberally the stores of scientific knowledge which he had accumulated, and led his followers to copy here and there subordinate characteristics of his method, no one of his followers ever took up his mantle, or was able to rise to an achievement equalling the figure of the risen Christ at Borgo San Sepolcro. The quality of his genius was exceedingly subtle and fleeting, and amongst the pupils who came to him for instruction not one in a hundred would be endowed with faculties sympathetic and delicate enough to apprehend, much less to reproduce, the spirit of his teaching. His greater disciples are justly famous in the world of art, but not one of them ever was to him what the young Raphael was to Perugino, or what Filippino Lippi was to Botticelli.]

Before giving a detailed account of the painters who, by their surviving work, show some traces of a study of Piero's method, it will be well to refer briefly to his

sojourn in Rome, and to consider the question as to what influence may have been exercised by the frescoes he is said to have painted there under the direction of Pope Nicolas V. Whatever the subject of these frescoes may have been, it is certainly permissible to infer that their presence must have tended to break the fetters under which mediæval art had languished, and to counteract any tendencies towards asceticism and conventional handling which may have lingered in the temperament of any of the painters who were brought face to face therewith. Let us therefore consider whether we can detect in the work of any of the painters, who have left their mark on the walls of the Vatican, some fresh departure, some new inspiration, which dates from the time of his engagement. The first name to suggest itself is that of Raphael. The astounding genius of this marvellous youth, after he had once come to realize his powers, would not be likely to bend itself to the sway of any master ; but in the growth of the greatest intellects there must always be particular points of time when some new and decisive impression will make itself felt. One of these epoch-making moments may well have come to Raphael when he stood and gazed upon the frescoes of Piero which he had been commanded to destroy. Whatever their creations may have been, Raphael certainly must have seen them, and the recorded statement of Vasari that he caused them to be copied by his assistants before their destruction, warrants the inference that he found in them something to admire and perhaps to imitate.

Up to the time of his quitting Florence for Rome in 1508, Raphael had painted only one picture which was



not religious in subject, that is the *Three Graces*, now in the gallery at Chantilly, wherefore, in order to execute the task laid upon him by the worldly and ambitious Julius II., he was compelled to equip himself with a new set of ideas so as to be able to illustrate adequately scenes of secular history and dramatic episodes in the picturesque mythology of the ancients, and to celebrate generally the glories of the humanistic ideal. It would certainly be a stretch of the imagination to profess to detect in Raphael's treatment of the *Sacrifice of Isaac* or of the *Deliverance of Peter* any manifest and unquestionable traces of the method of Piero, whose frescoes once stood upon the walls of the same apartment.<sup>1</sup> Such a course would be a surrender to that craving for special illustration which is one of the infirmities of modern dissertations on painting, but it is a perfectly legitimate hypothesis to imply that Raphael may have found the calm and reticent treatment used by his Umbrian predecessor to be full of suggestive and stimulating counsel in those moments when he was debating in what spirit he should set to work to give form to these imaginings which, as far as he himself was concerned, belonged to a new and strange world.

Amongst the achievements of pictorial art existing in Rome at the date of his visit, it is hard to single out one which could have stimulated Raphael's brain and hand to the production of such triumphs of composition as the *Disputa* or the *School of Athens*; but, though the painters might have been unsuggestive, the poets had

<sup>1</sup> According to Vasari, *The Deliverance of Peter* and the *Miracle of Bolsena* were painted over Piero's frescoes ("Vita," vol. ii., p. 492).

been fruitful, and had already conjured up word pictures of dramatic and stately spectacles, such as the "Trionfo della Fama" and the "Trionfo d'Amore," which glow in Petrarch's pages: and Raphael, with no foreboding of the contempt destined to be manifested in after times towards painters who illustrate literary themes, may well have betaken himself to this fount of inspiration when he was maturing the scheme of his immortal works. But besides these sources there were others which he might well have approached. Rome was then the haunt of men of learning and culture, though Julius II. found more use for soldiers and statesmen than for poets and rhetoricians: Inghirami, Sadoletto, and Beroaldo are a few of the names which may be quoted, and in conversation with men such as these Raphael may well have been brought to realize the leading points of the great argument he was about to illustrate, and to select with discretion the special famous personages to be depicted as representatives of this or that great epoch of the world's history.

With regard to Raphael's fresco of the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, it has been already noted that a theory—a bold one, but not without claims for consideration—has been started to demonstrate that the drawing of the angel, swooping down from heaven to arrest the hand of Abraham, was most likely inspired by the superseded work of Piero: the perfect arrangement of space, the severity of line, and the general harmony of composition being cited as proofs that the inspiring influence might well have come from the work of the artist who painted the *Vision of Constantine* in the church of San Francesco at Arezzo. In the *Deliverance of Peter*, also, the skilful

management of light and shade—here treated with a facility Raphael had never hitherto approached—lends a certain plausibility to the view that Piero had previously painted in the same apartment some dexterous example of chiaroscuro, and that Raphael made a careful study of the same before he set to work upon his own fresco. The night effect, the rays of the moon, the glare of the torches, the light reflected from the shining armour of the guards, the misty smoke, and the carefully treated masses of light and shade all certainly tend to support the view that Raphael may have approached the execution of this fresco with his eye enriched by some fresh suggestion, taken from the work of Piero which was destined to give place to his own. To go a step farther, it is by no means impossible that, some time or other, Raphael may have visited Arezzo, and there have gathered other and more general impressions from the frescoes in San Francesco. But at the present day, when the besetting infirmity of the art student is to write axioms in water, and to claim finality in a court the decisions of which will be successively upset until every picture, over which they now wrangle, will have fallen to dust, such suggestions as those above written should only be advanced as hypothetical.

It is vain labour to attempt to prove everything and to speculate as to every particular instance in which the young Raphael may have been influenced by his great forerunner; but, as has been already remarked, it is almost certain that a general influence, powerful and far reaching, would diffuse itself from any work which Piero may have left on the walls of the Stanze.

A careful consideration of Raphael's works in the

Sala d'Eliodoro, encourages the view that it is in the famous fresco of the *Parnassus*, where the painter turns his back upon asceticism and mediæval types, and revels in the glorification of music and poetry, and in the joy of life ; and again in the magnificent study of anatomy in the small lunette of the *Fall of Man* on the ceiling, that the leaven of Piero's influence has worked with the happiest effect. In these compositions Raphael casts off the last trammels of mediævalism, and accords a worthy treatment to the human form, drawing it with a nobility, freedom, and vigour equal to that used by Piero's great pupil, Luca Signorelli, in the Duomo at Orvieto. It would be superfluous to seek for any further instance of Piero's influence on the finest flower of Umbrian art.

## CHAPTER XII

### HIS PUPILS AND FOLLOWERS

TO come to the men who lived nearer to his own time, and putting aside Melozzo da Forlì and Luca Signorelli, the two men who are commonly rated as the direct inheritors of whatever legacy Piero as a teacher was able to transmit, there is to be found amongst the Italian painters of the fifteenth century, a distinguished set of men whose work gives evidence of a study more or less intimate of his types and methods. From the fact that the painters aforesaid are most numerous in the school which subsequently became identified with Perugia, there seems a high probability that Piero must have spent a considerable time in that city at some period after his sojourn there as the pupil of Domenico Veneziano.

Benozzo Gozzoli, who was Fra Angelico's assistant in painting the roof of the chapel of San Brizio in the cathedral at Orvieto, was a contemporary rather than a follower of Piero, but in some of the early work which he left in Umbria, indications of Piero's influence may be observed. His frescoes in the church of San Francesco at Montefalco show the closest affinity to Piero's method : these indeed are some of the weakest of Benozzo's paintings, for it was not until he developed an independent style in the Campo Santo at Pisa, and in the

Palazzo Riccardi at Florence, that his charm was fully revealed. Benozzo may be designated as the herald of the Florentine movement in this part of Umbria, and the contemplation even of his imperfect creations seems to have stimulated the poverty-stricken school of Perugia to seek help and strengthening from other Umbrian masters who had also gained, both in strength and sweetness, from the teachings of Florence.

Bonfigli, whose paintings are scarcely to be seen out of Perugia, was in all probability a fellow-student there with Piero under Domenico Veneziano; for his works which are now in Perugia show signs, especially in the matter of technique, of the influence of Piero and of Domenico as well; his draperies, however, are painted somewhat in the manner of Filippino Lippi. It is in the sober majesty of his figures, and in his flower-crowned angels, full of dignity in spite of their baby faces, that the traces of Piero's style are most marked. In the picture of the *Death of San Ludovico* the combined influence of Piero and Domenico is well illustrated, the facial portraiture and the grouping of the figures being strongly reminiscent of Domenico's style, while the architectural surroundings are evidently taken from some study by Piero, the details of perspective being very carefully rendered. But in colour Bonfigli was more in sympathy with Benozzo Gozzoli than with his master or his fellow-student, and the rich raiment of his lovely angels and the golden glow in which they sit and sing were fruits of a portion of his technique which Piero had no share in providing.

Giovanni Boccatis was another of the Perugian masters who came under the combined influence of Piero della

Francesca and Benozzo Gozzoli, his imitation of Piero's manner being most clearly marked in a *Head of the Virgin* and a *Crucifixion* in the Pinacoteca at Perugia. Matteo da Gualdo, whose chief work is to be seen at Assisi, and Lorenzo di Viterbo, who painted a remarkable set of frescoes in Santa Maria della Verità at Viterbo, are painters who may be included in the same category. With regard to Lorenzo, Piero's influence is less apparent in the frescoes at Viterbo, than it is in the less interesting work in San Francesco at Montefalco. At Viterbo, on the vaulting over the altar, Lorenzo's figures of St. Augustine writing, of the Venerable Bede, of the prophet Ezekiel and of the Evangelists are visibly imitated from Benozzo Gozzoli, so far as the faces are concerned, but the treatment of the draperies is just as certainly modelled on Piero's method. Of the frescoes on the walls, the *Annunciation* reveals also an imitation of Gozzoli's style, but the *Going into the Temple*, and the *Nativity*, with its delightful touch of neighbourly solicitude on the part of the attendant women, are clearly inspired by Piero's manner.

Altogether the invasion of the Renaissance sentiment springing from Florence achieved a less facile victory in the parts around Perugia than in other districts of Umbria. There existed, however, a special reason for the sustained, and, in a measure, successful resistance of the ascetic spirit in Perugia, and this reason was to be found in the near neighbourhood of Assisi, and in the still potent working of the legend of St. Francis. The impression originally produced by the exhibition of Giotto's great achievement at Assisi, and nurtured by the still vivid associations connected with the saint's life

and teaching and miracles, was as yet too strong to be neutralized by the infusion of any extraneous sentiment, however efficient and persuasive the exponents of the same might be. In its extreme manifestations the tendencies of this wonderful legend were unquestionably morbid and unwholesome; but, for good or evil, these manifestations appealed powerfully to local sentiment, and set an indelible stamp on the character of any paintings which may have been produced in the region. Neither Domenico Veneziano in 1438, nor Piero della Francesca, when at a later period he painted the altarpiece for the monastery of Sant' Antonio, succeeded in modifying the methods and aims of the Peruginese artists so strongly as did Benozzo Gozzoli, whose expression of the devotional spirit was more marked and sympathetic. They even affected them less than did Carlo Crivelli, who, by those of his pictures which he left in the Mark of Ancona, unquestionably helped on the Umbrian school in richness of decorative effect. Moreover, the fame of Fra Angelico, and the frescoes which he painted at Orvieto, and in other central Italian cities earlier in the fifteenth century, had tended to strengthen the growth of the devotional sentiment amongst the Umbrian painters, and at the same time to deaden their susceptibilities towards the recently arisen scientific impulse of which Piero della Francesca was the most noteworthy interpreter.

It was in the eastern provinces of Umbria; amongst the painters of the Mark of Ancona and the Duchy of Urbino, that the traces of Piero's influence are most strongly apparent. The difference in the social and physical conditions of these regions from those prevalent



round about Perugia may partially account for this result. That excessive hysterical emotionalism which pervaded the secluded valleys of the Upper Tiber found a less congenial *milieu* in the busy towns of the eastern coast, and amongst the shrewd, prosperous *contadini* who tilled the fertile plains lying adjacent thereto. Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that Piero's influence in these regions made itself felt less by the exhibition of his own powers than by the teaching and method of his pupil Melozzo da Forlì, through whom Giovanni Santi, Palmezzano, Corradini, and Niccolò d'Alunno were especially affected. Melozzo's great work at Loreto would naturally have spread his fame as a master in the regions adjacent.

Giovanni Santi was coeval with, or perhaps senior to Melozzo, wherefore it is unlikely that he ever was, strictly speaking, his pupil. Like Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, whose best work is now in the Pinacoteca at Perugia, Giovanni Santi shows signs of Mantegna's influence, an influence which in his case was probably operative through Piero; but with regard to Fiorenzo, the resemblance to Mantegna is so strongly marked, that it seems certain this painter must, some time or other, have come under the direct teaching of Mantegna himself. Perhaps Bartolommeo Corradini (Fra Carnovale), whose share in the large picture in the Brera at Milan<sup>1</sup> has already been discussed, painted more like Piero in style than any other of his followers. The Brera picture is evidently the work of two painters, and it is not difficult to point out the portions of it in which Piero had no hand;

<sup>1</sup> Page 65.

nevertheless, the work of one artist does not clash with that of the other, the influence of the master having proved strong and penetrating enough to compass unity both in spirit and in expression.

Marco Palmezzano, the representative pupil of Mezzo, can scarcely be quoted as an inheritor of any material share of Piero's legacy; but his works are worth study as examples of the divergence between the Eastern and Western schools of Umbrian painting. They abound in Forlì, but the finest example is a *Madonna and Saints* in San Francesco at Matelica.

It would be easy to add largely to the list of painters falling into the category of the aforementioned; but it is doubtful whether any clearer notion of the character and extent of the diffusion of Piero's teaching would be thereby attained; indeed, in whatever aspect it may be studied, the question of the influence exercised by Piero on art at large is exceedingly difficult to determine. The modification of types, and the more faithful and symmetrical rendering of the same, constitute that portion of his legacy which meets the investigator on the threshold of his inquiry; but to trace those *quasi* invisible forces, which were set in action by Piero's adoption of the scientific method, and by the operation of his marvellous natural gifts, is a task which, for reasons of space, cannot here be attempted. It must suffice to remark that the operation of these forces is general rather than particular; that it may in many cases be detected and grasped by comparing the work of those men who had seen and studied his creations, with that of others who had not enjoyed this privilege; and that its most important manifestations will be found

to lie in the nobler and more elevated conceptions, and in the more learned and symmetrical renderings, which marked the great age of Italian painting, rather than in the works of any special group of men.

The condition of the Umbrian school of painting as it existed at the time of Piero's opening activity has been already noticed. Very soon after this period the followers of the masters before-named<sup>1</sup> began to show signs of the infiltration of the spirit of the Florentine revival, and it was left to Piero to seize the full significance of this vivifying impulse, and, by uniting thereto the purer tendencies of the prevailing current of thought, and by treating it with the superior knowledge he had acquired, to put a seal on the art of his day, and to lead into the art current of the age that fertilizing rill which affected the productions of the great men who followed him as widely and as permanently as did the primal revelation of Masaccio's powers.

In brief, it may be said that Piero's influence upon art is to be traced in the more enriched and humane interpretation of life essayed by those of his followers who rightly comprehended the significance of his message, rather than in any copying of details or reproduction of style or handling. The literary eulogists of the Renaissance have made it an article of faith that the revival of the arts was essentially the result of the imitation of classic forms, an awkward and incomplete statement of a position which, after a very cursory examination, will be found untenable. To take two great representative figures, Andrea Mantegna and Piero della Francesca,

<sup>1</sup> Page 95.

and to assert that these two, by following the lessons of classic antiquity, advanced along the same path by the same methods and were substantially at one in their practice, would be to court overthrow. On the one hand Mantegna formed his style by direct imitation of ancient sculpture and of architectural remains, a process natural enough in his case, seeing that in no city of Italy was the classical tradition more faithfully preserved than in Padua. He worked with admirable patience and observation, and trained his hand to set upon the panel a presentment of the human form, dignified and symmetrical indeed, but a statue rather than a living figure. His fundamental error was that he spent his powers in reproducing on the flat what another man had carved in stone. The hard Roman type of the models he studied in his youth affected his style long after he had ceased to copy them ; and, though he had never freed himself entirely from mannerism, his frescoes in the Church of the Eremitani at Padua show that, at the time when he executed them, he had advanced towards naturalism at least as far as any of his contemporaries. The inborn poetry of his nature and his powers of invention enabled him to give to his paintings an attraction and charm in which many other compositions derived from origins strictly legitimate, are entirely wanting. His exquisite technique, the sense of motion he is able to communicate in spite of his faulty methods, and the magnificent figures of his warriors and apostles, compel our admiration, but for some reason his pictures lack the life which seems to pulsate even in the forms which grew under Giotto's less instructed pencil. Piero, on the other hand, began at the point designated as vital by the Greek critic, Pamphi-

lius, that is, in the study of geometry. He went to the fountain-head, saturating himself with the learning of the ancients, and working his way to excellence by the employment of scientific rules. A creation of Piero's was produced by the application of a general law which would serve its purpose to the end of time, and not by the copying of a particular object by a hand governed by no definite principle. Such creations as have been handed down to us in the *Risen Christ*, or in the *Mary Magdalen*, or in the eager warriors of the *Battle of Constantine*, may be rated as triumphs of constructive energy achieved by the application of knowledge to the harmonizing and delineation of the mental impression, and saved from artificiality and from all signs of the *limæ labor* by the transforming vigour of the artist's hand.

It is not in the nature of things that the transferred semblances of statues and columns and architectural details, which constitute so large a portion of Mantegna's handiwork, should be endowed with the seminal strength of Piero's creations, which plainly proclaimed the story of their evolution; which led his followers to study as he had studied, and ultimately to produce, each according to his particular gifts, the most splendid triumphs in the history of art; a result which would never have been achieved by the most assiduous copying of the products, however fine, of a bygone age.<sup>1</sup> As of another, it might be said of Piero:

" He doth bear  
His part, while the one spirit's plastic stress  
Sweeps through the dull, dense world, compelling there

---

<sup>1</sup> The horses in the battle pictures at Arezzo and in the *Trionfi* in the Uffizi are Piero's most evident imitations of the antique.

All new successions to the forms they wear,  
Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight  
To its own likeness."

His "compelling" hand assuredly stamped his work with an individuality more intense than any other painter ever compassed, but this feat never has nor ever will win for him the notice of the people who merely talk about painting. It is no uncommon thing to come across a list of Italian painters which lacks his name; and in a recent popular selection of Vasari's lives his life is not to be found. His work, scanty in volume and unattractive to eyes sated with the obvious and the commonplace, will never commend itself to any but those who have set themselves to study it with zeal and application, for it is not by cursory inspection, nor by the mere committal to memory of the names and locations of his pictures, that any one will be able to realize the full significance of his achievement, or to determine in what degree it contributed to the enlightenment and dexterity of the men who, during the succeeding century, gave to the world its greatest historical masterpieces.

CATALOGUE OF THE WORKS OF  
PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA  
AND OF CERTAIN WORKS ATTRIBUTED TO THE  
ARTIST, ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THE  
GALLERIES IN WHICH THEY  
ARE CONTAINED

### NOTE

*Where numbers are given thus [No. 6], they are the numbers of the catalogue of the gallery. These cannot of course be guaranteed, as alterations are not infrequently made in the arrangement of the pictures.*

*Several pictures attributed to the artist have been included which the author cannot accept. These are denoted by an asterisk.*



# CATALOGUE OF WORKS

## *BRITISH ISLES.*

### LONDON, NATIONAL GALLERY.

\***PORTRAIT OF A LADY.** Head in profile. In tempera, on wood, 1 ft.  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in.  $\times$  11  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. [No. 585.]

Formerly in the possession of the Marchese Carlo Guicciardini of Florence. Purchased at Florence from the Lombardi-Baldi collection in 1857.

This is no longer ascribed to Piero.

**THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST IN THE RIVER JORDAN.** In tempera, on wood, 5 ft.  $5\frac{1}{2}$  in.  $\times$  3 ft.  $9\frac{1}{2}$  in. [No. 665.]

Formerly the principal altar-piece of the Priory of St. John the Baptist at Borgo San Sepolcro. When the priory was suppressed in 1807 the picture was removed to the sacristy of the Cathedral, where it formed the centre portion of an altar decoration, the remainder of which was by another hand. It was bought by Sir J. C. Robinson for Mr. Uzielli, at whose sale it was purchased for the National Collection in 1861.

Christ is standing in the river, under the shade of a pomegranate tree, receiving the water on his head from the cup of the Baptist; the dove is descending upon him. On the spectator's left are three angels witnessing the ceremony other figures are on the banks of the river, in the background. Composition of six principal figures.

\***PORTRAIT OF A LADY.** In tempera, on wood, 2 ft. × 1 ft. 4 in. [No. 758.]

Formerly belonging to the Counts Pancrazi, in Ascoli. Purchased from Signor Egidi, in Florence, in 1866.

Said to be a Contessa Palma, of Urbino. A bust in profile, life size.

**ST. MICHAEL AND THE DRAGON.** On wood, 4 ft. 4½ in. × 1 ft. 11 in. [No. 769.]

Formerly in the possession of Signor Fidanza at Milan. Purchased from the collection of Sir Charles Eastlake, P.R.A., in 1867.

The Archangel is standing full-length and nearly life-size, clothed in a coat of blue and gold armour, and he has large white wings ; on his feet are red socks, open in front. He stands on the slain beast or serpent, the detached head of which he holds in his left hand ; in his right he has his bloody sword. Inscribed ANGELUS POTENTIA DEI LUCHA.

**THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD.** On wood, 4 ft. 1 in. × 4 ft. [No. 908.]

Formerly in the possession of the Franceschi-Marini family, of Borgo San Sepolcro, descendants of the painter, who entrusted it for sale into the hands of the Cavaliere Ugo Baldi in Florence, where, in 1861, it was bought by Mr. Alexander Barker. Purchased for the National Gallery at the Barker sale in 1874.

The child is lying on the ground on the corner of the mantle of the Virgin, who is kneeling in adoration ; five angels are singing, or playing on musical instruments. In the background is a ruined shed or stall, in which are seen an ox and an ass. Joseph is seated behind the Virgin on the ass's saddle ; near him are two shepherds. In the distance a hilly landscape and the view of a town. Unfinished.

## OXFORD, CHRIST CHURCH LIBRARY.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ANGELS.

## GERMANY.

## BERLIN, MUSEUM.

STUDY OF ARCHITECTURE. Tempera, 4 ft. 1 in. × 7 ft. 9 in.  
[No. 1615.]

\*PROFILE PORTRAIT OF A LADY. 1 ft. 8 in. × 1 ft. 2 in.  
[No. 1614.] From the Ashburnham Collection.

\*TOBIAS AND THE ARCHANGELS. [No. 1616.] 1 ft. 2 in. ×  
10 in. Lent by Dr. Bode.

## ITALY.

## AREZZO, DUOMO.

THE MAGDALEN. Fresco.

## AREZZO, BACCI CHAPEL, SAN FRANCESCO.

*North and South Walls*: THE STORY OF THE ORIGIN AND  
DISCOVERY OF THE CROSS. *East Wall*: THE AN-  
NUNCIATION, THE VISION OF CONSTANTINE, TWO  
FIGURES OF SAINTS. Two frescoes. *On pillar of Choir*  
*Arch*: HEAD OF ANGEL. Frescoes.

## BORGO SAN SEPOLCRO, MUNICIPIO.

THE RESURRECTION,—SAN LUDOVICO. Frescoes.

BORGO S. S., OSPEDALE DELLA MISERICORDIA.  
Altar-piece, in oil and tempera.

BORGO S. S., VILLA CATTANI. HERCULES. Fresco.

## FLORENCE, UFFIZI.

PORTRAITS OF FEDERIGO AND BATTISTA, DUKE AND DUCHESS OF URBINO. [No. 1300.]

Two busts in profile, painted on two little doors ; on the other sides of the panels are two allegorical compositions representing the Duke and Duchess in chariots.

N.B.—These are in the third hall of the Tuscan school.

## MILAN, BRERA GALLERY.

MADONNA AND CHILD, WITH SAINTS AND ANGELS, AND PORTRAIT OF FEDERIGO DI MONTEFELTRO, DUKE OF URBINO, KNEELING. 8 ft. 2 in.  $\times$  5 ft. 7 in. [No. 187, Sala II.]

From the Church of San Bernardino, Urbino.

## MILAN, POLDI-PEZZOLI GALLERY.

\*PROFILE PORTRAIT OF A LADY. Tempera, 1 ft. 6 in.  $\times$  1 ft. 9 in. [No. 21, Sala III.]

On the back is the inscription : "Uxor Joannes De Bardi."

## MONTERCHIO, CHAPEL OF THE CEMETERY.

FRESCO OF MADONNA AND ANGELS.

## PERUGIA, PINACOTECA.

VIRGIN AND CHILD AND SAINTS. Altar-piece. Above this a lunette of the Annunciation. [No. 21, Sala V.]

From the church of the suppressed monastery of Sant' Antonio in Perugia.

## RIMINI, SAN FRANCESCO.

PORTRAIT OF SIGISMONDO PANDOLFO MALATESTA AND ST. SIGISMUND, HIS PATRON SAINT. Fresco.

SINIGAGLIA, SANTA MARIA DELLE GRAZIE.

MADONNA AND CHILD AND ANGELS.

URBINO, PINACOTECA. ARCHITECTURAL STUDY.

URBINO, DUOMO. THE FLAGELLATION.

VENICE, ACCADEMIA (SALA PALLADIANA).

ST. JEROME AND A KNEELING DONOR IN A RED DRESS, SAID TO BE GIROLAMO, SON OF AGOSTINO AMADI. Signed "PETRI DE BŮGO SCI SEPVLCRI OPVS." Underneath the kneeling figure is the inscription: "HIER AMADI . AVG . F." Panel, 1 ft.  $7\frac{1}{2}$  in.  $\times$  1 ft.  $5\frac{3}{4}$  in. [No. 49.]

Mr. B. Berenson describes a picture by Piero, *The Triumph of Chivalry*, belonging to the Historical Society of New York, but this society disclaims the possession of any such picture.



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